

MARY STUART

BY

G. W. M. REYNOLDS.



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THE
MARY STUART
QUEEN OF SCOTS

PART II

BY

G. W. M. REYNOLDS

Author of the First and Second Series of
"The Mysteries of London," "The Coral Island," "The Bronze Statue,"
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etc., etc.



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MARY STUART

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PART II.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ROYAL MARRIAGE.

IT was early in the morning of Sunday, July 29, exactly four weeks after the memorable ride from Perth to Callander House, that the nuptials of Mary Stuart and Henry Darnley were solemnized in the Chapel Royal of Holyrood.

This ancient palace—one of the most remarkable edifices of the Scottish capital—had been completely fitted up anew for this festive occasion. Every possible means had been adopted to banish the aspect of ancient feudal gloom from within those walls, and to establish in its stead a veritable air of palatial magnificence. To the accomplishment of these ends, numerous workmen and artificers had been procured from France—which country was at that time far ahead of Scotland, and even of England itself, in all the elegancies and comforts of domestic life. Thus it was now curious to behold how the flood of civilization from the Continent was pouring through the massive Gothic portals of Holyrood, sweeping away all the remnants of feudal barbarism; while at the same time the roselike light of luxury

diffused itself through the spacious halls which until then had been plunged in the sombre gloom of past ages. The transformation of the scene was rapid and complete; so that old-fashioned butlers, sedate stewards, and greyheaded henchmen looked on at first with mingled awe and apprehension, as they beheld dingy tapestries yielding to arras of cloth of gold, moth-eaten curtains giving place to the richest hangings, the rushes on the floors being superseded by thick Turkey carpets, and chandeliers of silver taking the place of solid iron lamps.

But the old domestics of the palace were speedily led to view those innovations with pleasure, and then to watch with increasing delight and amazement the farther progress of the improvements which displayed the elegant taste of their royal mistress. Thus the huge uncouth tables of common wood, were succeeded by oaken ones elaborately carved and brilliantly polished, or else by marble tables supported on gilded frames of exquisite workmanship. Instead of empty recesses or suits of armour standing upon pedestals, the apartments of Holyrood now displayed handsome sideboards covered with

porcelain vases, china jars, and crystal flagons, filled with flowers or with perfumes which imparted a delicious fragrance to the air. The mantels and chimney-pieces, instead of being ornamented with martial weapons or trophies of the chase, were now set out with horologes that chimed the hours and played various tunes ; and there were likewise ornaments of virtue in endless variety. The drawing-rooms contained chess-tables of ebony inlaid with mother-of-pearl ; while the chess-men, in fit and truthful illustration of the respective names, consisted of exquisitely carved statuettes of kings and queens, bishops, knights, and men-at-arms (*pious*, or "pawns,") in addition to the miniature castles surmounted by flags of the rival colours. Venetian cabinets, of filagree gold and silver, stood upon little tables or cheffoniers covered with cloths of crimson velvet fringed with gold ; and those cabinets were stored with manuscripts in rich vellum binding, comprising the choicest specimens of poetry and romance belonging to the French, Italian, Spanish and English languages. There were also tomes of the Latin classics, history, and science ; and many a marginal annotation in Queen Mary's own hand, showed how fully her intellect comprehended or how her fine taste appreciated these abstruser studies.

But before concluding our description of the sweeping improvements thus effected in Holyrood palace, we ought to observe that the sleeping apartments were furnished with a degree of splendour and elegant corresponding with the munificence of the sitting-rooms. The draperies of the beds were of velvet

fringed with heavy bullion—or of damask elaborately embroidered—or of taffety passamented with gold ; while the canopies and head-pieces were of cloth of gold or silver. In every direction gold arras or pictorial embroidery had displaced the dingy old tapestries wherein had collected the dust of centuries ; or else the previously naked stone-work of the walls was covered by wainscoting of polished oak, the panels of which were painted to represent the chastest subjects from heathen mythology or the holiest from Christian lore. Harps, lutes, and other musical instruments glittering with gems — celestial and terrestrial globes on gilded pedestals — rolls of maps and charts, carefully drawn, and richly coloured, bore additional evidence, beyond the vellum-bound tomes already noticed, to the elegant accomplishments of Mary Stuart.

Such was the palace of Holyrood at the time when the nuptials took place—such were the changes and improvements which had been effected within its walls in preparation for the bridal ceremony.

As early as five o'clock in the morning of that memorable Sunday, the beautiful Mary Douglas issued forth from her own chamber and proceeded to the apartment of her royal mistress. She found that the Queen had already risen, and having thrown on a loose elegant morning-wrapper, was seated at a Venetian cabinet the filagree doors of which, with their crimson lining, stood open. Mary Stuart did not immediately notice the presence of Mary Douglas, who accordingly stopped short near the threshold which she had just crossed ; for the entire posture of the

Queen was so completely indicative of deep meditation that the young handmaiden feared lest she might be intruding at that particular moment. The casement was open ; the fresh breeze of morn penetrated gently into the apartment—and the early sunbeams tinted with a soft reluctance the redundant masses of hair which rolled like floods of burnished gold upon the shoulders of our royal heroine. One hand was supporting that beautiful head : the other was holding some object upon which the gaze of the soft-hazed eyes was rivetted. Thus the Queen sat with her back half turned towards the door by which Mary Douglas had just entered the chamber ; and as the Queen saw her not immediately, the young Maid of Honour caught with a half-vanishing effect the Grecian profile of that delicately and divinely beautiful face.

"Ah, my sweet friend ! is it you ?" said the Queen, suddenly giving a slight start as she became aware of the presence of Mary Douglas : and then she made a movement as if she were about to thrust into the cabinet the object which she held in her hand.

"Perhaps I have come too early, gracious madam ?" faltered the Maid of Honour : "perhaps I have indiscreetly intruded ?"

"Not so, Mary—not so," replied the Queen. "It is five o'clock to the moment ; and this is the hour at which I bade you attend upon me. You are therefore more punctual than the other Maries."

At this instant Mary Seaton made her appearance ; and the timepiece on the mantel in the

royal boudoir began to proclaim the hour of five.

"You also are welcome, my dear friend," said the Queen, with her wonted look of affectionate kindness towards Mary Seaton ; "and you are punctuality itself. Draw near, both of you, and look at these objects which I have been contemplating, and which I was just on the point of restoring to their place in the cabinet when you my minions, made your appearance. You have never seen these things before !"

As the Queen thus spoke, she beckoned the two handmaidens to approach the cabinet ; and as they did so, they both gave a start at the objects which met their eyes. The Queen had just laid down upon the ledge of the cabinet a crystal watch fashioned in the shape of a coffin, and of the most curious workmanship. Close by it stood an object of still more sombre or even horrible aspect,—being nothing less than the miniature imitation of a skull, helmeted and plumed. It was made of silver, and was in effect also a watch, the hollow of the skull containing a little bell of the same metal as the rest of this singular object.

You are surprised, my minions, as well you may be," resumed the Queen, perceiving that the two Maries exchanged looks of mingled wonder and awe, "that I should be possessed at all of such sinister emblems of mortality—but still more so that I should choose such a moment as this for their contemplation.—You do not speak ?"

"What would your Grace have me say ?" asked Mary Douglas, unable to repress a shudder. "Those gloomy images ; those

emblems of doom and death ! Oh, may all the good angels grant——"

But she stopped short, with a sudden repugnance to finish the sentence she had commenced.

"Nay, my dear friend," said the Queen, with a benignant smile, "hesitate not to give expression to your thoughts. You tremble lest there should be something ominous in the contemplation of these gloomy symbols on the morn of a bridal day ? But to my mind it is when the sun is shining brightly and the odours of flowers are wafted around us, and nature is gay and cheerful,—it is then that it become us to think of the vicissitudes of life—not in despair of heaven's power or goodness to keep us from harm, but in preparation for any chastening influence which the divine wisdom may think fit to shed upon the soul. You must not think, my dear friends, that I am prone to superstitious despondency, or that I am foolishly or impudently advancing to meet misfortunes half-way. Far from it ! But I fear that my spirit is at times too buoyant and hopeful—too soaring and exultant, and I would fain remind myself that though I am a Queen I am but a mortal like yourselves ; and likewise that though this is a day of happiest hopefulness, its bliss must not be suffered to intoxicate the senses !"

Mary Seaton reflected in profound silence at this speech. She was better acquainted than Mary Douglas with the peculiar phases of the Queen's mind, and was not therefore altogether astonished at this development of some of its most contrasting lights and shades. But Mary Douglas was bewildered—pained—even

shocked at a circumstance which struck her as ominously foreboding in respect to the alliance about to be solemnized.

"I must tell you," resumed Mary Stuart, speaking in a tone which was gradually softening into melancholy, "that when the untimely death of my young husband, King Francis, left me a widow nearly five years ago, methought that the world would never again have smiles for me, and that heaven's darkest cloud had already overshadowed my youthful existence ! And therefore was it that in the gloom and despondency of my soul, I secretly procured these emblems of mortality, which I was wont to contemplate in the silence and solitude of my own chamber. You remember, my friend,"—thus addressing Mary Seaton—"that I was very melancholy ; but you knew not *how* melancholy ! I threw a veil as much as possible over my griefs, for fear of adding to the affliction of the dear friends who loved me and by whom I was surrounded. And for this reason I hid from every eye these emblems of death and gloom. In due course my mind regained its healthier tone ; and, to be brief, a long, long period has gone by since last I contemplated those sinister objects. But this morning, when awakening on a second bridal day——"

"Oh, dear madam !" ejaculated Mary Douglas, "your Grace should have reflected that it is a day of happiness complete and unalloyed—and that if you have known losses and sorrows, and griefs and cares, yet that heaven is now bent upon rewarding you !"

"Yes, my sweet friend—yes,"

said the Queen, with a smile of serenest softness and most exquisite sweetness : " my faith and my experience alike teach me that there are smiles born of tears, that the rainbows are brightest on the storm-cloud, and that the sweetest violets have their birth-place in a rock-cleft. It is therefore with these impressions that I seek to attune my soul to the lessons which they are calculated to teach, and that even at the moment when the cup of bliss is approaching my lips, I bend my head in meek submission to the divine will."

With these words Mary Stuart took forth from the little cabinet a crucifix of ebony, with the effigy of the Saviour in ivory—an exquisite piece of carving—and pressed it devoutly to her lips. Then, suddenly closing the doors of the cabinet, locking them, and thus concealing the sombre symbols of mortality from the view, the Queen rose from her seat, saying with all her wonted gaiety of tone, " Now for the bridal toilet !"

At the same moment Mary Seaton and Mary Fleming made their appearance ; and glancing at the time-piece on the mantel, they both commenced apologies for being some ten minutes or a quarter of an hour late. But Mary Stuart cut short their excuses with her habitual forgiving kindness of manner ; and the four Maids of Honour thereupon began to address themselves unto the toilet of their royal mistress. This made due progress, until the Queen presently said, " I have myself already looked out the dress which I intend to wear for the occasion. It lies upon the sofa in the inner boudoir. Go, one of you, and fetch it."

It was the part of Mary Douglas, being the youngest of the four Maids of Honour, to perform this duty ; and she accordingly sped to the elegantly-appointed little lounging-room designated by the Queen. But again was she destined to experience a sudden shock, and it was only the force of consternation's self which prevented an ejaculation bursting from her lips, as she beheld a morning garb spread out upon the sofa. What meant this funereal vesture in place of the snowy raiment of a bride ? Was it as if a mourner at a grave that the Queen of Scotland was about to proceed to the nuptial altar ?

Pale as a statue, and motionless as one, Mary Douglas stood riveted to the spot, her eyes fixed upon the sable vesture,—until she was startled from her trance-like reverie by the sound of a light footstep, and the voice of Mary Seaton, saying, " Be quick, dear, Mary !—the Queen is waiting for the bridal dress !"

" But where is it ?" asked Mary Douglas.

" There !" replied Mary Seaton, pointing to the mourning garments.

" This ?—*this* the bridal dress ?" and Mary Douglas shuddered visibly.

" Ah, I see ! you do not understand," said Mary Seaton : and then over her own countenance came an expression of deepest seriousness. " Yes—it were better indeed if this had not been so ! Heaven grant that it prove not an omen of sinister import !"

" What is it that you mean ? What is it that I do not understand ?" asked Mary Douglas, hurriedly and excitedly.

"Hush," said Mary Seaton, placing her finger upon her lip.

"I will tell you presently—or perhaps the Queen herself will allude to the circumstance. Come quick, dear Mary!—and, Oh! let us hope for the best in every respect!"

The mourning garb was accordingly conveyed into the Queen's dressing-room; and, as Mary Seaton had more or less foreseen, her Majesty began to make comments which to Mary Douglas served as explanations.

"Four years and a half ago," she said, "did I don that dress for the first time in woeful mourning for the young husband who was snatched so prematurely to the tomb! Methinks 'tis a sage and wise lesson which the etiquette of courts teaches, when it bids a wedded Queen wear her sable weeds on that bridal day which makes her the wife of a second husband."

Mary Douglas thought on the contrary that it was a species of etiquette which was fraught with a sinister ominousness; and she would have been right well pleased to see it dispensed with.

"But ye shall have my gala dress in readiness, monions," continued Mary Stuart; "so that immediately after the ceremony I may put off the vesture of woe, and assume the emblems of a happier period of life."

When the royal toilet was completed, and the Queen was apparelled in her sable attire, the Four Maries hastened to the accomplishment of their own toilets; and they all arrayed themselves in virgin white as most suitable for the part of bridesmaids which they had to perform. A little before six

o'clock the Queen was escorted to the Chapel Royal by the Earl of Lennox, who was so soon to become her father-in-law; and she was attended by many ladies of rank and distinction, in addition to her Four Maries. There were likewise several of the noblest peers of Scotland in the royal suite; and amongst the guests who were honoured with invitations on the occasion was Sir Lucio Gualdi. We should observe that, Randolph and Killigrew were not invited to be present at the ceremony, on account of the coolness which at the time subsisted between Scotland and England.

If the Queen, obedient to the stern coercion of court etiquette, was compelled to appear in the sable vesture and mourning hood of her widowed condition, there was on the other hand no reason wherefore the bridegroom should be under any similar restraint. Nor was he: for his costume was of regal magnificence—and perhaps it was even more gorgeous than was entirely consistent with good taste, considering the contrast which it formed to the vesture of the bride. But the Queen was by no means disposed to exercise a critical eye on the occasion: she saw only the Adonis-like beauty of the youthful husband whom the solemn ceremony was about to give her. Full well and tenderly did she love him; and as she knelt by his side at the altar, all gloomy ideas were dispelled from her mind—all sombre fore-castings were banished—and no superstitious dread for the future flung its shade upon the refulgent heaven of her happiness.

The ceremony commenced; and a grand spectacle it was—that

stately fane thronged with all that was brightest and noblest, loftiest and loveliest, of the Scottish people. The organ pealed grandly through the Gothic aisles as the Bishop of Brechin headed the procession of priests and choristers that wound its way from the vestry to the altar. And first the reverend prelate read the papal dispensation sanctioning the marriage of the cousins; and then full notice was given of the banns having been published with due regard to the forms of the Protestant faith, in the Parish Church of the Canongate. The religious ceremony then proceeded according to the ritual of the Roman Catholic Church: the venerable Bishop pronounced the nuptial benediction—and Mary Stuart became the lawfully-wedded wife of Henry Darnley!

Considerable crowds were assembled in the neighbourhood of the palace; and when the trumpets proclaimed that the ceremony was over, enthusiastic shouts burst forth from the concourse. Money was scattered in abundance amongst the people; and the cry of "Largesse" was now sent forth in acknowledgment of the royal bounty. Meanwhile the Queen returned to her own suite of apartments, where by the assistance of her Four Maries the sable garments were exchanged for the bridal vesture: and the heart of Mary Douglas was relieved when she beheld her royal mistress apparelled in a style which to her thinking was far more appropriate for the circumstances of the occasion. Festivities and rejoicings followed: there was a grand banquet, to which a numerous and brilliant company sat down; and in the evening there was a ball, at

which the royal pair danced together. We must not forget to add that Sir Lucio Gualdi figured in the gay scene:—and need we inform the reader that his partner in the Spanish minuet and the French galliarde was the beautiful Mary Douglas?

Having placed upon record sufficient particulars with respect to the royal marriage, we are now about to pursue the thread of our story.

It was exactly three weeks after the bridal that the following scene occurred in the gardens of Holyrood Palace,—those gardens which the Queen found on her accession to the throne in the condition of an overgrown wilderness, but, which, thanks to her exquisite taste, had undergone a complete transformation at the hands of French horticulturists. They had been replenished with the choicest fruits and most beautiful flowers that could be made to flourish in the Scottish clime: the conservatories and hot-houses were special objects of the interest for all who had the privilege of entering those grounds: fountains played in every direction; and in the middle of a little mound stood a sun-dial of sculptured marble. But perhaps not the least important object of attraction in the royal gardens was the menagerie which Queen Mary had established there, and which contained some fine specimens of savage beasts.

It was at the hour when the sultriness of an August afternoon was merging into the coolness of evening that David Rizzio might have been seen wandering, with a slow step and thoughtful manner, through the gardens of Holyrood Palace. An expression of deep mournfulness

rested upon his sallow countenance; and from time to time a sigh came up in his breast and words of anguish wavered upon his lips.

"Is it possible?" he murmured to himself: "can I have so mistaken his real character and disposition? is it possible that I could have been so grossly deceived? May it not be a temporary intoxication of the senses?—a bewilderment of the brain produced by so sudden an elevation to such a dizzy height? Would that I could persuade myself that it is so!—But, Ah! I hear a footstep approaching!"

The worthy old man thereupon endeavoured to smooth his countenance and banish from his features that anguished expression which he felt at the moment they were wearing—when from an adjacent avenue of verdure he beheld approaching the very individual who was the object of his thoughts. This was none other than the young King—for so we must now denominate Henry Darnley. He was appalled in magnificent costume: he walked with a conceited, self-sufficient air; excessive vanity was visible in every look and gesture, and therewith was blended a certain appearance of dissipation and rakishness. He had been indulging in deep potations of wine, which had flushed his cheeks and rendered his step unsteady. Rizzio saw that he had been drinking, and would have avoided this interview, if possible: but it was too late to turn aside—and moreover the young monarch beckoned him to approach.

"So ho, Master David!" ejaculated King Henry, in that species of supercilious tone which was

half contemptuous and half patronizing. "I meet you here, do I? Well, I see no particular harm in your being permitted to walk in the royal gardens—though I am not clear but that it is a privilege which only ought to be conceded to the highest and noblest."

"If I thought, sire, that my presence was an intrusion here," answered the old man, deeply humiliated, "I would not again venture within these precincts."

"Make yourself easy upon that score," said the King; "we accord you our royal permission to walk in these gardens occasionally—and that is sufficient. It is, however, just as well that you should know your own place and position, Master David, and that you should not presume upon the favour which has hitherto been shown towards you."

"If ever at any period of my life I possessed any undue pride, Heaven knows that I have experienced mortifications sufficient to crush it out of me altogether!"—and it was with a deep sadness, but with no tinge of bitterness, that the old man thus spoke.

"Well, well," said the King, in a petulant tone, for his temper was rendered irritable by his potations; "If I condescend to give you a little wholesome advice, I do not want you to set yourself up as an injured individual. But perhaps you think I am under obligations to you, and that I have not adequately repaid them? Come, speak out—and let us understand each other."

"We do already understand each other, sire," answered Rizzio, with the profoundest respect. "Your Grace has become a great King, and your words have just now

reminded me that I am one of the humblest and meanest of individuals."

"There you are again!" exclaimed the royal youth, petulantly, "making your very meanness of position a reproach against those who tell you of it! But do you remember who I am?" he went on to demand with insolent bearing: "does not royal blood roll in my veins? and am I not a King?—while you are descended from a poor and wretched parentage in Turin!"

"I know it, sire," rejoined Rizzio. "But I do not think that I have ever presumed upon whatsoever amount of favour has been shown me; while I certainly have experienced a deep and imperishable gratitude for all kindnesses."

"But I tell you," cried the young King, "that you *have* presumed! Listen—and do not interrupt me! I am glad that we have thus met;—it is as well that I should tell you my mind frankly. For the last few days you have been flinging strange looks upon me. Do not dare deny it!—I am not to be deceived! You little think, sirrah, that I am fitted by intellect, as well as by birth and accomplishments, for the regal position which I hold. I tell you therefore that I am not to be deceived by any hypocrisies on your part."

"Hypocrisies, sire?" said Rizzio, in a tone of gentle remonstrance. "Believe me, I deserve not the imputation."

"Then why do you look so strangely at me on certain occasions?" demanded the young King. "Speak, sirrah! I command you!"

All in a moment the little deform-

ed old man, who seemed to have been shrinking into nothingness, with a sense of abject humility, raised his head, while a peculiar light flashed in his eyes, as he exclaimed, "Your Majesty commands me to speak?"

"To be sure, I command you," replied the young King, gazing with an air of curiosity upon the Italian secretary; and then he burst out into a contemptuous laugh.

"Since your Highness commands me to speak, I will do so," proceeded Rizzio, unabashed by that jeering laughter. "Humble and obscure as I know myself to be, and as you have reminded me that I am, I was nevertheless at one time thought worthy of your confidence. It was to me, sire, that you first revealed the secret of your love for the Queen of Scotland:—it was I who undertook to ascertain whether your advances would prove agreeable. To the best of my ability, sire, I promoted your suit with your royal cousin. And why did I do this? Because it was my firm belief that your Grace was the most eligible suitor for the hand of the Scottish Queen. Pardon me for adding that I felt grateful to you, sire, because you treated me with kindness; and therefore I was well pleased to give my aid in furtherance of a project which seemed to me so well calculated to ensure the happiness of you both."

"Go on," said the young King, whose face was now livid with rage, and whose teeth gleamed beneath the whitened lips.

"Let me add," continued Rizzio, "that if for a single moment I had foreseen that this alliance was not calculated for the consolidation of

the Queen's happiness, I would never have done aught in furtherance of your suit :—I would have perished sooner ! And now your Grace tells me that I have lately dared to look strangely upon you. Yes !—and I dare more !—I am venturesome enough to obey the command which your Highness has give me—to speak out ! Oh, let it be in terms of entreaty, and not of reproach—of prayer, and not of remonstrance !—let me beseech your Grace to reflect that three short weeks of marriage have only as yet gone by, and that the bride whom you swore to love and cherish already experiences neglect ! And, Oh, sire ! for your own sake let me, the sincerest though the humblest of your well-wishers—let me entreat your Majesty to stop short ere you plunge more deeply into the vortex of dissipation !”

“Have you finished ?” demanded the King : then without waiting for a reply, he turned abruptly round upon Rizzio as they reached the end of the avenue along which they had walked together ; and all his pent-up fury burst forth. “You too dare to lecture me ? Have you taken a leaf out of the book of that insolent declaimer, John Knox, who thinks that he may rebuke even Kings from the pulpit ? Miserable reptile that you are ! I have for some time suspected you—and now I see through you completely ! Your mask has fallen off ! You thought that if you helped me to marry the Queen, you would obtain a hold upon me—you would have a King under your thumb ! But you are mistaken ! You treated me as a mere boy !—you see that I am a man : Vile hunch-back ! you would have—

tool and your instrument ; but I will show you that I am your master ! Wretch ! down upon your knees, and thank the saints that I forbear from trampling you utterly under foot !”

It was with the calm dignity of a conscience perfectly clear from the selfishness and hypocrisy of which he was accused, that David Rizzio listened to this torrent of charges and invectives ; and when the King had finished speaking, through failure of breath, the Italian secretary said, with that mild sadness which he so often displayed, “if your Grace could read my heart you would know how little I deserve these imputations, and you would grieve that your lips should have uttered them.—But holy saints protect us !”

An awful consternation seemed all in a moment to come over David Rizzio ; and fearfully strange was the altered tone in which he gave utterance to those last words. The King and himself had reached the end of the avenue, in front of which was the array of dens containing the wild beasts. The reader must understand that each one of the most savage beasts had a lodging of two cages separated by a sliding partition ; so that when the keeper performed his task of cleaning the dens, he was not compelled to enter along with the dangerous brutes, but could shift each particular animal into one cage while he entered the other for the purpose of sweeping it out. This explanation will enable the reader to comprehend the incidents which now immediately followed.

The eyes of David Rizzio, while he casually glanced towards the

menagerie, had discerned the appalling fact that the iron grating or door in the front of the lion's cage was unfastened, and that it needed but one bound on the part of the huge African monster to bring him forth into the garden. This was the sight while all in a moment elicited that ejaculation of terror—"The holy saints protect us!"

The young King, startled by the words, and by the manner in which they were uttered, flung his looks in the same direction, and became aware of the same fact. So mortal a fright appeared to seize upon the miserable youth, that his knees bent under him, and he clung to Rizzio for support. The lion was already raising himself up, as if for the fatal spring!

At that instant another circumstance met the vision of David Rizzio. The door of the next cage, which was empty, stood open!

"Courage, sire!" said the old man, "and you are safe! Quick, into that cage!"

Galvanized as it were into sudden action—electrified by a wild hope of safety flashing in upon the most appalling terror—the young King sprang forward, rushed into the empty cage, closed the door, and was safe! It was all done in the twinkling of an eye,—aye, and that which followed too! For the loud clang with which the iron gate was shut, startled the lion in the next cage. One bound, and he sprang forth!—one second of time, and the unfortunate Rizzio was beneath the monster's feet!

But at that critical, that awful moment, footsteps were heard—a warrior in steel panoply appeared upon the scene with a drawn sword in his hand—and a terrific roar

burst from the African monster as he prepared to spring at Sir Lucio Gualdi.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FIVE THOUSAND POUNDS.

THE beams of the setting sun played with a brilliant effect upon the bright steel armour of Sir Lucio Gualdi, while the naked sword which he carried in his hand shone as vividly as if it were a flash of lightning. Dazzled by the blaze, the lion suddenly seemed to become cowed, and to abandon its intention of springing at the advancing warrior: but though the huge animal drew back a pace or two—thus leaving the form of David Rizzio free from the pressure of its weight and the peril of its claws—yet did it not seem altogether decided on abandoning its intended victim. There was a lurid fierceness in its gaze, while its roaring had subsided down into a series of ominous growlings. With a face pale as death, though being himself in perfect safety, the young King watched from behind the bars of the neighbouring den, the progress of this tremendous and fearful adventure.

Not for one instant hesitated Sir Lucio Gualdi. Perceiving that the animal was already half-frightened at his presence, he knew that it would require only one bold stroke to consummate a triumph. Therefore, suddenly shifting the manner in which he held his sword, and grasping it by the blade, he dealt the lion a heavy blow upon the head with the hilt of the weapon. The

animal crouched down as if half stunned ; and then Gualdi, following up his success, clutched the shaggy mane of the brute and urged him towards his den. As completely discomfited as a whipped dog, the huge African monster crept back into his cage, on the floor of which he threw himself down heavily, resting his muzzle between his two fore paws. The iron grating closed upon him with a loud din, and all danger was over.

At that same instant there was a rustling amongst the adjacent trees ; but it passed unperceived by those personages with whom we have now to deal.

David Rizzio, springing up to his feet, seized Gualdi's hand and pressed it to his lips, dropping tears of gratitude, and calling him the saviour of his life.

"You are not hurt?" inquired our hero, quickly.

"No! Heaven be thanked!" responded Rizzio. "I escaped all injury from the lion's claws——"

"And the King?" said Gualdi, as he restored his weapon to its sheath.

"I am all safe!" exclaimed Henry, as he emerged from the den, the grating of which David Rizzio had just hastened to unfasten. "It was fortunate you came, Sir Knight! But really, my good friend David, it was not my fault that the door was shut ere you had followed me into the cage!—I scarcely know how it was—the grating must have slipped somehow—it could not have been by my hand——"

"If I had received a mortal wound, sire, from that animal—and if I were now bleeding to death,

observed Rizzio, "I should die in happiness with the knowledge that you were safe."

The young King was trembling with nervousness and with confusion: the fright which had half-killed him, was now mingling with the shame of the dastard part which he had played: but he would have fumed and blustered and endeavoured to carry it off with a high hand, if he had not caught the dark eye of the Italian Knight fixed keenly upon him. Indeed, Gualdi already comprehended sufficient of the recent of adventure to perceive that the young King had thought only of himself in the moment of danger, and that with the basest cowardice he had abandoned the poor old man to the fury of the escaped monster.

"I think it is scarcely necessary to say anything more upon the subject," remarked Gualdi, with a certain degree of cold contemptuousness in his tone.

"Not another word!" exclaimed Rizzio; "not another word!—unless it be to renew the expression of our most fervid gratitude to yourself, Sir Knight——"

"You have already thanked me, worthy Rizzio," interrupted Gualdi, pressing the old man's hand warmly; "and it is sufficient!"

"But I also must thank you, Sir Knight," the young King hastened to exclaim; "and I think with you that it would be better if nothing more was said upon the subject—I mean to say that it were wise if no publicity were given to the incident—for it would frighten the Queen to the utmost degree if she were to learn unto how great a danger I had been exposed—and her faithful

Rizzio also.

"It is not from my lips," said Gualdi, whose manner towards the King was cold, though sufficiently respectful,—“it is not from my lips that a syllable shall go forth touching this adventure.”

“Then look upon me as your friend, Sir Knight!” cried King Henry: and with every appearance of the most grateful enthusiasm, he pressed Gualdi’s hand; but at the same time, with characteristic deceitfulness and black-heartedness, he experienced a bitter hatred against the brave warrior who had learnt the secret of his dastard cowardice.

Gualdi—who was too lofty in spirit and independent in nature to be rendered the dupe of the royal youth’s hollow promises, even though he might not have altogether fathomed the full extent of their hypocrisy—bowed with a cold hauteur; and then turning to Rizzio, he said, “Methinks, worthy Signor David, you had better procure a draught of wine, or some other refreshment, after the shock you must necessarily have sustained.”

“Yes!—come with me to my own apartments, good David!” cried the King; “and there you shall have wine, or whatsoever may best please thy palate. And you, Sir Lucio—will you accompany us?”

“Not yet, sire,” responded our hero. “I will lose no time in looking after the keeper, who is scarcely worthy to be retained in his place, if I may judge of the carelessness which alone could have permitted the escape of that monster!”

“But not a word to the keeper of what has taken place!” cried the King, appealingly. “It were better

not to chide him too severely, for fear lest he should think that something of a serious character had veritably and actually occurred. Do you mark me, Sir Knight? do you not agree with me?”

“Rest assured, sire,” rejoined Gualdi, scarcely giving himself the trouble to repress the smile of contempt which he felt was beginning to wreath his lips,—“rest assured that it will be no fault of mine if any particulars of this evening’s adventure shall become public.”

While this concluding portion of the colloquy was taking place, David Rizzio could not help contrasting in his own mind the characters and dispositions of those two personages whom he stood contemplating,—that youthful Sovereign and that young Knight—the former personifying whatsoever was weak and imbecile in Monarchy, the latter typifying everything that was great and glorious in chivalry; the former arrogant, vain, and conceited—the latter careless of praise and impatient of flattery; the former compelled to descend to the meanest artifices in the hope of hiding his cowardice—the latter seeking no blazonry for his brave deeds; both young, both handsome—but, Oh! how different in the impressions which their looks were calculated to leave upon the mind of the beholder!

It was still with these thoughts floating in his brain, that David Rizzio followed the young King away from the scene of the adventure which threatened at one moment to prove fatal to the worthy old man who would gladly have sacrificed his own life to save that of the youth who was so dear to Mary Stuart. As for King Henry

himself, he was too intelligent not to have perceived that readiness of self-sacrifice on Rizzio's part : but he was of too malignant a disposition and ill-conditioned a temper to experience any better feeling towards that faithful individual. In deed, he hated Rizzio all the more on account of this additional obligation under which he had been placed towards him ; and still more so, because he knew that his true character in all its selfishness, its cowardice, and its baseness, had just been fully revealed to the old man.

"Good David," said the treacherous youth, now assuming a tone and air of the blandest friendship, "it grieves me to think that angry words should have ere now passed between us : but I fear—if the truth must be confessed—I had taken a goblet too much of wine—It was for this reason that I came forth into the garden to catch the breeze along these avenues—I was cross and irritable—and I spoke thee in terms—which—which—"

"Enough, sire !" interrupted Rizzio. Let me simply express a hope that your Highness will henceforth never doubt my fidelity to your interests or my devotion to your person."

The evil-natured youth bit his lips almost till the blood came, at being thus reminded of Rizzio's generous self-sacrifice, and of his own base cowardice. But he was compelled to dissemble ; and it was, therefore, in blandest and suavest tone that he said, "Henceforth, worthy David, we shall know each other better. You will not—you will not—mention to the Queen—a syllable of aught that has taken place——"

"I would sooner perish, sire !" exclaimed Rizzio, fervently. "My word once pledged——"

"Yes, yes ! I know that it is sacred !" interjected the young King. "Good Rizzio ! kind Rizzio ! you are indeed a faithful friend ! I will never reproach you again ! But tell me, dear David !—tell me, kind old man !—do you think Sir Lucio Gualdi will keep his promise——"

"I can answer for the Roman Knight as for myself !" exclaimed Rizzio.

"Good, good, my worthy friend," said King Henry. "But Gualdi must have thought it strange—I mean that he must really have fancied that I had not acted just as I ought to have done in leaving you to the lion. So if, my dear friend, you would just take the opportunity of whispering a word to Sir Lucio—you know what to say—I need not suggest anything to a person of your shrewdness and sagacity—while, on the other hand, I know that I can rely upon your friendship——"

"Your Grace need say no more," interrupted Rizzio. "I will take the earliest opportunity of speaking to Sir Lucio Gualdi."

"Thanks, my good friend !—thanks, !" rejoined the King, whose cringing and abject cajolery of tone and manner now contrasted most strikingly, and even disgustingly, with the overbearing arrogance and cruel invective which but a short half-hour back had marked his speech towards David Rizzio. "I must bestow some present upon thee, my kind good friend——"

"I need none sire—I need none !" hastily interjected Rizzio, to whom these transparent cajoleries were

almost as distasteful as the taunts which he had recently received from the same source.

"Yes, yes,—but I must give you something," persisted the King, who in the selfishness of his own heart thought that no one else could be disinterested, and that bribery or promises of bribes were needful to secure the services which he required. "All these rings"—and he glanced and the numerous jewels glittering on his fingers—"were the gift of the Queen, and, therefore, I cannot part with any one of them—"

"And even if you could, sire," broke in Rizzio, "not for worlds—"

"Do let me have my own way, my dear friend!" interrupted the King. "There is the gold chain which I used to wear before my marriage—I will see if I can lay my hands upon it in the course of a day or two. And then there is the poignard set with precious stones, which I remember you once admired—"

"Do not speak to me of gifts, sire," again interrupted Rizzio.

"Yes, yes—but you shall have them!" rejoined the King. "And now I must hasten to the Queen—while you perhaps, dear Rizzio, will think of the best means of saving my reputation—I mean to say, of preventing this Roman Knight—this Gualdi—from thinking poorly of me."

Having thus spoken, the youthful Sovereign patted Rizzio caressingly on the shoulder, and then separated from him. The worthy old man signed and shook his head, as he stood gazing after the retreating form of the Queen's husband.

"Alas, alas! a liar as well as a

coward!" thought Rizzio: for he knew that the King had lost the gold chain, link by link, to Sir Thomas Randolph at the gaming-table; and that the begemmed poignard had fallen into the hands of Sir Henry Killigrew as the result of a wager laid upon the cast of a die.

Let us now return to the spot where the adventure with the lion had occurred.

Immediately after the King had retired with David Rizzio from the place, Sir Lucio Gualdi glanced quickly around, and was about to retrace his steps along the path which had brought him thither at so critical a moment, when there was a rustling amidst the foliage close at hand, and Mary Douglas emerged from behind a dense wall of evergreens. At the instant that she thus appeared before Gualdi, her countenance seemed more than ordinarily pale; but the next instant a flush of carnation hue tinged her cheeks—her superb dark eyes kindled with light—and her entire countenance expressed the most fervid admiration, as she looked up into the nobly-handsome face of her lover. There was something in that suddenly-changing aspect,—something in the agitation which pervaded her whole form, which at once made Sir Lucio suspect the actual truth.

"Dearest Mary!" he said, taking her hand and pressing it rapturously to his lips; "you have kept the appointment! you have come to meet me! How can I sufficiently express my gratitude—my joy?"

"Noble-hearted Lucio! magnanimous Knight!" murmured Mary Douglas, unable to repress in her

looks the admiration which glowed in her heart ; " I have heard and seen enough to make me aware of the bold deed which you have done, and of the generous self-denial which has induced you to pledge yourself to secrecy, so that none shall know how your prowess overcame even the most ferocious of brutes !"

" Ah : " said Gualdi, whose suspicion was thus confirmed. " So you beheld something of the little incident—which was indeed a trivial one after all——"

" No—not trival, Lucio ! " ejaculated the maiden, with enthusiasm. " I drew nigh unto the spot at the very moment the monster overawed by your look, was crawling back ignominiously into his den. I stopped short in horrified amazement—while consternation stifled the cry of terror that rose up to my very lips. The iron grating clanged—and you were safe !—just heaven ! how freely did I then breathe ! And next I heard all that David Rizzio and the King said ;—and if ever there were an excuse for a young maiden in daring to gaze with admiration upon a knightly countenance, it is now—and that excuse is mine !"

" Dearest Mary ! " exclaimed our hero, once more pressing her fair hand to his lips. " I thank thee for these words, which are to me the fullest and fondest proof you have ever yet thought fit to vouchsafe that the love which I cherish for these is thus sincerely reciprocated. ' Tis true that in the gardens of Callander House, seven weeks ago, you did accept the avowal of my love—you gave me hopes in return ; but nevertheless you enjoined stipulations which im-

pressed me with the idea that you might after all be merely seeking an excuse for delay in order that you might the more completely analyse the tendencies of your own heart. True it is also that during those seven weeks we have often met—that I have ridden by thy side in the royal retinue—that I have been thy partner in the dance within the palatial halls of Holyrood ; but it is equally true, my Mary, with respect to the *one* most charming topic there has been a seal upon our lips ! Now therefore that you have complied with the request I ventured hastily to breathe in your ear when assisting you this forenoon to alight from your steed,—now that in obedience to that entreaty thou hast met me here,—let me ask you, dear Mary, formally, seriously, and solemnly, whether you accept the plight of my love and will pledge me thine in return ?"

It was with downcast looks and with deepening blushes upon the cheeks, that the young maiden listened to the words which thus flowed from the lips of Sir Lucio Gualdi : but when he had finished speaking, she raised her eyes with that expression of frankness and candour which was the chief characteristic of her beauteous face ; and she said, " Yes, Sir Knight—I accept the offer of your noble heart : but it is needless for me to pledge my troth in return, for thou hast already won it."

Sir Lucio strained the maiden in his arms ; and the vows of sincerest love were ratified by exchange of sweetest kisses.

" But remember, Lucio," quickly resumed Mary Douglas, as she disengaged herself from the Knight's embrace, " remember that the

stipulation which I laid down at Callander House must still hold good, and that we may not dream of the ensurance of our own happiness until that of the Queen be established on a solid foundation !”

“I am ready to fight in her cause, Mary,” answered Gualdi ; “and if civil war shall arise—which indeed seems to be only too probable—rest assumed that it will not be in the rear rank of the Queen’s forces that I shall be found.”

“I know it, Lucio—I know it,” said Mary Douglas, flinging upon her lover a look of mingled fondness and admiration. “The rebels are flocking fast, it is reported, to the standard of my misguided half-brother and the Associate Lords——”

“But when the Queen lifts her own banner—which she will not doubt shortly do,” interrupted Gualdi,—“her loyal subjects will gather around it far, far more speedily than the disaffected ones are repairing to the headquarters of the rebels. My only surprise is that the Queen has not already issued a proclamation summoning all good men and true to take up arms in her defence. It is nevertheless natural that her Majesty prefers a peaceful honeymoon——”

“Oh, believe me, Lucio,” interrupted Mary Douglas, “the Queen remains not inactive from choice, but from necessity ! Fain would she unfurl her banner this moment—gather an army—place herself at its head—and march against the rebels ! But, also ! she lacks the means ! Her coffers are well-nigh empty ; and in the present unsettled state of affairs she cannot sum-

mon a parliament to levy new taxes. There is no time for a proceeding which must inevitably be attended with the delays of state formalities and ceremonies. In one word, Lucio, would you believe it ?—yet it is the truth which I am about to tell you——”

“What is it ?” inquired Gualdi.

“That for the want of some four or five thousand pounds,” rejoined Mary Douglas, “the Queen of Scotland is unable at this moment to raise an army for the defence of her throne !”

“By St. Antonio, how singular !” ejaculated Gualdi. “Four or five thousand pounds, say you ?”

“Yes. The sum is not large for a Queen’s requirements—but yet on the other hand ’tis large for an empty treasury, an impoverished nobility, a poor country !”

“Five thousand pounds ?” repeated Gualdi, in amusing tone. “How singular !”

“What mean you ?” asked Mary Douglas. “There is something in your thoughts that I do not understand.”

“You tell me, dearest one, that ’tis only for the lack of such a sum as *this* that Queen Mary Stuart raiseth not her standard at once ?”

“It is even so,” answered the maiden : “but full easily may you conjecture, Lucio, that the Queen strives to her utmost to conceal her present poverty—alike from a becoming feeling of regal pride, as from the fear of affording encouragement to the rebels and of proportionately disheartening her own partisans.”

“I had almost suspected something of this sort,” said Gualdi ; “but still I was far from supposing

that the Queen's needs were great and her resources so small."

"You may believe that such are the facts, Lucio. It was but this morning," proceeded Mary Douglas, "that I overheard the Lord Chancellor Morton tell her Majesty that an army of at least five thousand men must be raised promptly, and might indeed be levied within a very few days. But to set such an army in motion there must be adequate funds: and the Earl of Morton's calculation is to the effect that as many men so many pounds, sterling, for the proper opening of a campaign."

"Most strange! most singular!" ejaculated Gualdi, still in a musing manner. "It is not simply accidental!—no! it is providential! And moreover, how wondrous a work of retributive justice may be accomplished!"

"Again I ask what mean you?" said Mary Douglas, gazing with intensest interest upon the handsome countenance of her lover.

"Tell me, my Mary—tell me," said Gualdi, "would it not be a striking trait of retribution if the Queen were enabled to fight the rebels with their own weapons, and vanquish them therewith? Would it not be a subject of fervid self-gratulation for the partisans of Mary Stuart, and of bitterest mortification for her enemies?"

"It would! it would!" ejaculated Mary Douglas. "But how is this to be accomplished?"

"This very evening was I bent upon a certain expedition," answered Gualdi,—"even before I had learnt from your lips these facts which now show how doubly important the result of my enter-

prise may prove,—that is to say, if it should terminate successfully!"

"And what is this enterprise?" added Mary Douglas. "Is it for this that you are arrayed in martial panoply, Lucio?"

"It is. And now listen, Mary," pursued Gualdi. "That billet in cipher which seven weeks ago you gave me at Callander House

"You told me even so lately as yesterday," interjected the maiden, "that you had not been able to discover the key to those hieroglyphics."

"And I told you truly," continued Gualdi. "During the seven weeks that it has been in my possession, I have constantly studied it; and it was only last evening that I succeeded in discovering the key!"

"And the words of the billet asked Mary Douglas, eagerly.

"I will repeat them," replied Gualdi. "They are exactly these:—*'The hour is altered! The Queen will leave at five in the morning! There will be no additional escort!'* I need hardly tell you," added, Gualdi, "that there is no name attached to the billet."

"No, no!" said Mary Douglas indignantly. "The traitor or spy, whoever he may be, that thus fathomed and betrayed the Queen's intentions on that memorable night, would scarcely run an unnecessary risk!"

"But now you will wonder," resumed Sir Lucio, "what the history of this billet has to do with the enterprise whereon I am presently bent, and for which I am already armed. I will tell you, my Mary. Last night there were gay royster-

Singers—perhaps you are aware—

in the pavilion at yonder extremity of this garden——"

"I know that the Queen was chafed at the King's absence so many hours from her," observed Mary Douglas; "although she endeavoured to conceal her vexation as much as possible. We heard that there was card-playing in the pavilion"——

Aye, and drinking deep potations likewise," said Gualdi. "There were some twenty or thirty nobles, knights, and gentles, many of whom ought to have experienced shame at the bare thought of encouraging the young King in his dissipations and debaucheries. There were the Earls of Athol and Sutherland—there was Lord Erskine too—there was Sir James Balfour, Governor of Edinburgh Castle—there were Randolph and Killigrew—there was Alexander Seaton, the poet—but no relation, thank heaven, to the good and amiable Mary Seaton, your friend and companion. There were others likewise, whom I might name——"

"It is needless, Lucio," interjected Mary Douglas. "But how is it that you know all these facts? for I cannot suppose that you were one of the revelling company."

"You only do me justice, Mary," rejoined Gualdi. "It was from that quick-witted page of mine, Oliver Dunsyre, that I gleaned all these particulars; for he, it appears, mixes much with the King's pages, and by their assistance he was enabled to obtain a peep into the pavilion last night. Alas! with sorrow be it said, the King drank deep draughts and played for high stakes. His purse was emptied of all its gold pieces. Randolph and Killigrew were his principal anta-

gonists—he was excited with drink and infatuated with the game he staked his chain, his dagger, and other valuables—one after another he lost them all. But enough of this sickening portion of the subject! I was about to tell thee, my Mary, that when sauntering in the garden this morning, I had the curiosity to look into that pavilion, concerning which my garrulous page Oliver Dunsyre had been speaking to me. The domestics had not commenced the clearance of the evidences of the previous night's debauchery. Tables were upset—goblets were broken—the contents of wine-flasks were spilled upon damask cloths—cards and dice lay scattered about. I lingered for a brief space to examine the paintings upon the walls, and then was on the point of turning away with no small feeling of disgust from the scene of a disgraceful orgi, when my eye caught a glimpse of a small satchel-purse lying upon the floor."

The object thus alluded to by Sir Lucio Gualdi, was nothing more nor less than that simple but useful article which in modern times we should call a pocket-book; for it contained tablets to write upon, and receptacles for letters, bills of exchange, or other documents.

"I picked up the satchel-purse," continued Sir Lucio "and opened it for the purpose of ascertaining, if possible, to whom it belonged, that I might hasten to restore it. Conceive my astonishment when I found that it contained several documents written in cipher, to some of which there was precisely the same key as that which I last night discovered in reference to the little billet brought away by you from Lochleven Castle!"

"How strange! how remarkable!" cried Mary Douglas. "It seems, Sir Lucio, as if Providence itself placed you in the proper path for the rendering of great services or the making of wondrous discoveries! But that satchel-purse—to whom did it belong? to whose hand did you restore it?"

"It is still in my possession, and will not immediately depart thence, until the web of certain proceedings into which I have obtained a partial insight shall be completely unravelled. I have my conjectures in respect to the ownership of the lost satchel-purse; but until proof positive be obtained——"

"Tell me nothing more than you think fit, Lucio," interrupted Mary Douglas. "I know that you are wise and discreet——"

"Dearest Mary, I have no secrets which I could wish to keep from you; but I am thus guarded in my speech because I would prepare you to be equally reserved in respect to all that I am about to tell you, until we find the means of turning surmise into certainty and conjecture into established fact. In short, dear Mary, methinks that I have entered upon the clue to unravel a conspiracy, so dark, so deep, so formidable, against the welfare of your amiable, beauteous, and persecuted Queen——"

"What! more dangers—more perils threatening Mary Stuart?" said the maiden, with a shudder. But, Oh! heaven be thanked that the task of detecting all these crimes should have been so inscrutably assigned to you; for you will frustrate them, my Lucio—will you not?"

"There is no endeavour that I will not make—there is no peril

that I will not dare, in order to achieve that end!" exclaimed Gualdi. "The best proof of my devotion, dear Mary, to the cause of your royal mistress, is the enterprise on which I am now about to embark, and which has been suggested unto me by one of the documents contained in that satchel-purse. I will now hasten to explain my meaning; for my time is growing short—it must be near eight o'clock—the hour at which I have ordered my page Oliver to have the horses ready saddled. I should have told you this forenoon, dear Mary, of all these things; but, as you will remember, there was not a moment's opportunity, while we were riding in the royal train, to whisper aught in your ear beyond the request that you would meet me in the garden this evening."

Sir Lucio Gualdi's speech was suddenly interrupted by the sound of a clarion, emanating from the inner court of Holyrood House. It was the summons for the Maids of Honour to attend upon the Queen at her evening toilet, in preparation for the supper-hour, which was early in the age whereof we are writing. That signal was given at eight o'clock precisely.

"By St. Antonio! so late!" cried Gualdi; "already eight o'clock, and so much still felt unsaid! Oh, how quickly passes the time when with those whom we love!"

"I must leave you, Lucio," observed Mary Douglas: "I must hasten to the Queen!"

"But I have yet so much to explain!" cried her lover.

"Oh, Lucio! if it depended only upon me," rejoined the blushing maiden, "I should not be thus hurried to part."

"I know it, dear Mary! A thousand thanks for the assurance! But tell me—tell me quick—where does the Queen sup this evening?"

"In the boudoir in James the Fifth's Tower," answered the maiden. "But wherefore do you ask?"

"Because it is probable that you may see me again to-night, Mary, in that very boudoir: for if my purpose be important, I may doubtless make bold to mount the private staircase and make my way into the presence of the Queen. Look not surprised, Mary—but keep your own counsel for the present—trust to me, dearest one—fear no indiscretion on my part! And now away with you!—for I also must remember that there is no time to lose!"

"Whatever be the venture whereon you are about to set forth, Lucio," said Mary Douglas, with a tender earnestness, as she gave him her hand, "may all good angels, keep guard over you!"

A hasty embrace was snatched, and the lovers then separated—Mary Douglas gliding along one of the shady avenues towards James the Fifth's Tower, and Sir Lucio Gualdi repairing at a quick pace to the stables attached to the palace. There he found his page ready with the horses, according to the orders previously given, and in a few moments the Knight and his attendant were passing out of the precincts of Holyrood.

Oliver Dunsyre was a good-looking, active, and well-made youth, of daring disposition, and full of bold aspiration to win the golden spurs of chivalry. This being his character, the reader may easily understand how such a personage as Sir Lucio Gualdi had

become the object of Oliver's most fervid admiration; and he was indeed supremely proud of serving such a master. Of these facts the Knight himself was by no means ignorant, and being a keen observer of human nature, he was well enabled to read all the mental and moral qualifications of his youthful attendant. Oliver was careful with his apparel: his corslet was always as bright as a polished mirror, and a black feather drooped gracefully from above his steel morion, or vizorless headpiece.

Gualdi and the page rode along in silence for some time after the outskirts of the city had been passed, and they were now upon the broad southern road which led in the direction of the English frontier. Sir Lucio at length reined in his steed somewhat, and beckoned the youth who was riding at a respectful distance, to push up alongside of him.

"Oliver," said the Knight, "there will presently be an opportunity for you to try the prowess of your arm."

"I rejoice to hear these words, Sir Lucio," exclaimed Dunsyre, his eyes brightening up and his countenance suddenly glowing with the fire of true courage. "Right glad were I to be enabled to prove, gallant master of mine, that I am worthy to follow in thy service!"

"Within the hour that is passing—probably in the course of a very few minutes," resumed Gualdi, "you will have occasion to draw that sword of yours from its sheath. Ah! I ought to ask, peradventure, whether you will hesitate to wield your weapon if you find that we have to fight against odds?"

"It ill becomes me, Sir Knight,"

rejoined Oliver with a modest ingenuousness of manner, "to vaunt beforehand of what I may be enabled to do ; but this much I may safely promise your worship, that I will bear myself to the best of my ability in whatsoever peril we may have to encounter."

"Well and prudently spoken, Oliver," said the Knight. "Now listen ! According to certain information which I have received, there will be three Englishmen journeying along this road presently—a gentleman and his two menials ; and for special reasons of my own it is my purpose to intercept them in their route. You will aid me, Oliver ?"

"Until the last drop of my blood," replied the page.

"Deeply would it grieve me, good youth," said the Knight, "if thy blood were shed from any dangerous wound. You may marvel, perhaps, that in order to make sure of the capture of this English gentleman whom we are about to intercept, I did not secure the aid of other followers besides yourself. But in the first place the whole adventure is one which it did not suit me to confide into the knowledge of too many persons ; and in the second place 'tis an enterprise which, without any undue vanity or presumption, I felt sure from the very first of being enabled to accomplish with no other assistance than your own."

Gualdi might have added that it was perfectly consistent with the daring venturesomeness of his chivalrous character to court those very dangers where the odds were against him, and to reject as cowardly precautions those measures which would in reality have been nothing more than consistent with

ordinary prudence. The page, as we have already said, partook of the master's reckless daring ; and they were well suited for the adventure which was now close at hand.

For scarcely had Sir Lucio Gualdi finished the observations which we have above recorded, when the trampling of horses' hoofs was heard approaching along the road at a quick pace.

"Keep by my side and be in readiness, Oliver !" said Gualdi ; and the glance which he flung upon the youth's countenance was perfectly satisfactory ; for mingled determination and eagerness were visible in every feature of Dunsyre's handsome face.

Through the partial duskiness of the evening three horsemen were soon perceived to be advancing,—one riding a little way in front of the other two. They were all well armed alike for offence or defence, having swords by their sides, daggers in their belts, corslets on their breasts, and pistols in their holsters. We may here add that the English gentleman himself was a middle-aged person, and that his two followers were strong, active, well-built young fellows of about five-and-twenty.

The road was wide, at the spot where the collision was now destined to take place. Gualdi and his page advanced at a slow case along the middle of the route, while the English traveller and his menials approached at a quick trot.

"Halt !" exclaimed Sir Lucio Gualdi in a commanding tone.

"Ah !" ejaculated the Englishman. "Robbers on the highway !" and quick as lightning he drew a pistol from his holster and discharged it point blank at Gualdi.

"Call us what you will—only surrender yourself!" exclaimed the Knight, within an inch of whose face the bullet whistled past, and as his sword flashed from its sheath, he spurred his steed forward to the attack.

The English gentleman's two followers were now upon the spot: but the intrepid Oliver Dunsyre was ready to meet one of them, while the other took part with his master in the combat against Gualdi.

We must now suddenly and abruptly shift the scene, and transport the reader away from the contemplation of the conflict in the dusk of the evening and in the midst of the broad highway, for the purpose of enabling him to peep into the Queen's boudoir at Holyrood palace.

Mary Stuart was seated at supper, in company with the Earl of Morton, Lord and Lady Erskine, and the Four Maries. The King was not present; and there was a shade upon the Queen's brow, despite all her efforts to assume her wonted gaiety. Mary Seaton watched her royal mistress with a look of tender sympathy: Mary Fleming and Mary Beaton chatted with their usual thoughtlessness upon all kinds of frivolous topics; and Mary Douglas glanced furtively from time to time at the horologe upon the mantel, wondering whether Gualdi would really make his appearance in the boudoir that evening, and if so, what the important object to which he had alluded could be.

"The King promised to sup with me this evening," said Mary Stuart, in reply to some observations made by the Earl of Morton, who held

the high post of Lord Chancellor: "for I had wished that his Grace should have the opportunity of joining me in consultation with your lordship, touching and concerning those matters which are each day becoming more and more pressing."

The Queen, with her natural goodness of heart, as well as her deep love for her husband, strove to invest him with as much importance as possible; and though she felt that she was beginning to be neglected by him, she endeavoured to the utmost of her power to conceal the actual state of her feelings by speaking of him in his absence with love and respect.

"Matters do indeed acquire a growing pressure, as your Highness most truthfully observes," said the Earl of Morton. "Hundreds and thousands are ready to rush to your Grace's banner the moment it shall be unfurled."

"Ah!" interjected the Queen: "but how unfurl it without the means of paying those who shall gather about it? Verily, my lord, I have entertained serious thoughts of raising the needful supplies on my jewels and gems——"

"Gracious Queen," interrupted the Lord Chancellor, "let us hope that your Grace may never be reduced to such an extremity as this."

"Good heavens!" cried Mary Fleming; "the idea that your Majesty should think of parting with your beautiful jewels."

"And to place them in the hands of vile usurers too!" cried Mary Beaton.

Mary Seaton's look of tender sympathy deepened as she turned her eyes upon the Queen: Mary

Douglas thought of all that Gualdi had said to her in the garden, and glanced anxiously at the time-piece.

The door now opened, and the King made his appearance. His countenance was flushed with drinking—his eyes were slightly blood-shot—he staggered somewhat in his pace as he advanced to fling himself into the chair on the Queen's right hand.

"What!" he exclaimed. "already finished supper?" "We waited some time for you," replied the Queen; "and as you came not, we thought you might be otherwise engaged. It is half-past nine o'clock, as you may perceive."

"The clocks are all wrong!" exclaimed the young King, who was irritated by wine and by his own thoughts. "I will have them all altered to-morrow."

"Henry," said the Queen, mildly but firmly, "the clocks require no alteration. If you could not favour us with your presence at the usual hour, it is sufficient that you tell us so. But better late than never! And here is my Lord Morton who would be glad to consult with us on the best course to be adopted in the present strait."

"Oh!" said the King, drawing himself up with an air of as much importance as his half-inebriated condition would allow him to assume: "my opinion is very soon given. Let us put the rebels to the horn——"

"They are already proclaimed outlaws, may it please your Grace," said the Earl of Morton. "Proclamation was made by the horn to that effect this day."

"Ah, well," continued the King,

"then let us collect an army to chastise them. This could be done in a few days."

"No doubt," said the Lord Chancellor, "the loyal subjects of your Majesties would gather at the earliest summon——"

"Then why, in the devil's name," demanded the young King, flippantly, "don't you summon them?"

"Sire," rejoined the Chancellor, seriously, "it is a question of money."

"Money?" echoed the King, pettishly, "I hate hearing of these incessant difficulties about money! It plagues me to death! I want money for myself—money I must have—and money I mean to have! We will summon a Council, and issue a proclamation levying taxes——"

"Impossible, sire!" said the Chancellor. "The proceeding would be illegal."

"Illegal, my Lord?" cried the King, angrily. "Nothing is illegal which I and the Queen command to be done!"

"Be calm, Henry," said Mary Stuart, kindly and gently. "We must not—we dare not take any step that may furnish the traitor-lords with a pretext for their rebellion! Believe me, Henry, this is a serious case, and requires grave consideration. It is the matter of raising an immediate sum of five thousand pounds——"

"Without which no army can be raised," interjected Morton.

"And if the rebellion should spread," continued the Queen, "the safety of the throne itself may be in danger!"

"Is the case so grave as this?" asked the King, sobered somewhat

by the sudden reflection that his

recently acquired diadem might possibly be torn from his brow.

"Here is Rizzio—our faithful adviser," said the Queen, as the old man entered at the moment. "Tell his Majesty, Signor David, that the very safety of the throne itself depends upon the prompt raising of the sum of five thousand pounds, and that we are all alike at our wits' ends to devise the means of obtaining this sum."

"It is only too true, sire," said Rizzio, who remained standing at a respectful distance from the table. "And alas that I should now be the bearer of evil tidings !—but it was for this purpose that I have ventured to intrude——"

"What tidings have you to impart?" asked the Queen : and all now suspense and anxiety was around the table.

"The rebel lords," responded Rizzio, "have mustered a large force at Ayr, and threaten to march upon Edinburgh."

"The young King turned as white as a sheet : the Queen drew herself up with an heroic air of determination ; and Mary Douglas glanced with increasing anxiety at the time-piece on the mantel.

"And so my very capital is threatened with siege and sack?" said the Queen. "Now therefore I am determined !—my mind is made up ! Hasten, good Rizzio !—this very night—this very moment !—fetch hither some rich goldsmith or money-scrivener—tell him that the Queen offers her choicest jewels and richest gems for the poor sum of five thousand pounds ! Speed, good Rizzio—speed !"

"Alas, gracious madam," replied the secretary, this cannot be done : for I must remind your Grace that

there is a law which makes it treason for any lender of money to receive the royal jewels as a pledge."

"Is this so?" cried the Queen, in consternation.

"It is even as Master David hath said," observed Lord Erskine, who was well learned in the Scottish laws.

"Then God help us !" said Mary Stuart, feeling as if all her firmness and courage were breaking down in a moment : "for in Him now is our only trust !"

Mary Seaton burst into tears at the spectacle of her beloved Queen's distress : Mary Douglas looked at the time-piece, and her heart sank within her as it began chiming ten.

But the metallic sounds of that chime were still vibrating through the room, when a door communicating from a private staircase was thrown open, and two persons appeared upon the threshold. One was a gentleman with soiled garments, with disordered appearance, and whose hands were tied behind him. Terror and confusion were in his looks. The other person was Sir Lucio Gualdi.

The heart of Mary Douglas bounded within her bosom.

"The five thousand pounds which your Grace requires," Sir Lucio Gualdi at once said, "are now forthcoming."

Ejaculations of wonder and joy burst forth all around.

"And what is more," continued the Italian Knight, "it is with English gold that your Majesty shall be enabled to fight your battle ! Yes—the gold which the subtle perfidy of the English Queen was sending to your traitor-foes ! For here is the envoy of Elizabeth

—the bearer of the subsidy ! Down, down upon your knees, Master Tamworth, and implore mercy at the hands of the Queen of Scotland !”

Thus speaking, Sir Lucio pushed forward his prisoner, who sank down as a suppliant for his forfeit life.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LETTER IN CYPHER.

THE incident which we have just related, occurred with an almost lightening rapidity ; and there was something which had even a præternatural air in the sudden appearance of Sir Lucio Gualdi, proclaiming that the required sum of money was forthcoming at the very moment when the Queen and her advisers were at their wits' end as to the mode of raising it. There was moreover something so startling—nay, almost astounding, in the announcement that it was gold which the Queen of England was remitting as a secret subsidy to the rebel enemies of the Queen of Scotland ; and the extraordinary declaration was on the instant confirmed by the sinking down of the English emissary into a suppliant posture begging for his life. And here, before immediately pursuing the thread of our narrative, let us inform the reader that the sum of five thousand pounds, according to its value in that age, was equivalent to twenty-five thousand of the currency of the present day, and could accomplish proportionate results. The importance, therefore, of such a sum may be easily conceived at

a moment when the royal treasury was empty and no immediate taxes could be levied. But perhaps of equally vital importance was the fact that this large amount should have been intercepted in its way to the hands of the traitor-chiefs to whose rebellion it would inevitably have furnished the means for expanding into the most formidable proportions.

From these observations it may easily be comprehended how immense were the services rendered to the cause of Mary Stuart by the blow, so bold and startling, which Sir Lucio Gualdi had struck on this memorable evening :—and need we add that if heretofore he had appeared in the light of a hero in the eyes of Mary Douglas, it was now with an almost God-like effect that he stood before her as a champion and a deliverer whom heaven itself seemed to have sent on behalf of a lovely, a virtuous, and a persecuted Queen !

“Gracious madam,” said Tamworth, the English emissary, sinking upon his knees, or rather falling down into that suppliant posture in obedience to the impulse of the push which Gualdi gave him with mingled contempt and scorn, as if he were a despicable groveling creature only to be flung disdainfully away from honest hands : “gracious madam, spare my life !”

“No ! by heaven,” cried the young King, starting up from his chair “there shall be no mercy for you, villain, if you are a friend of the rebels !” and springing forward, the intemperate youth drew his sword, and was about to plunge it into the breast of the wretched man who knelt bound and helpless before him.

"Not so, sire ! not so !" ejaculated David Rizzio, who, being nearest to the spot at the moment, sprang forward and struck up the King's sworn with his hand, just at the very nick of time to save Tamworth's life.

"Villain ! menial ! hound !" cried King Henry, furious with rage as he turned round upon Rizzio : "how dare you interfere ?"

"I thought, sire," said the old man, meekly and humbly,—with some sadness, but without the slightest tincture of resentment in his tone,—“I thought, sire, that I might possibly spare you the commission of an act for which you would perhaps hereafter be sorry !”

"Henry—dear Henry, I implore thee to be calm !" hastily whispered the Queen, as she caught her husband forcibly by the arm and drew him back into his seat.

"Yes, worthy Signor David," exclaimed Mary Stuart, "the King will indeed be grateful for your timely interference ! My royal husband's indignation is intelligible enough, and in its sudden outburst would even be justifiable under existing circumstances. But still 'twere well that he should not stain his good sword with the blood of one who, if we have understood our trusty friend Sir Lucio Gualdi aright, deserves only such treatment as the hangman may bestow upon him."

Mary Stuart, with that exquisite tact which she possessed, spoke in these terms for the double purpose of appeasing and vindicating her husband, and likewise of asserting her own superior sovereign right to pass judgment upon the case. Gualdi—who had been also on the point of springing forward to arrest the

cowardly blow with which the King had menaced a bound and helpless victim—flung a look of approval upon David Rizzio. As for the young King himself, he saw in a moment that he had committed another grave error, but that it was no time to hector or bully about it. The presence of Gualdi overawed him—the tone of command with which his royal wife had just spoken, surprised and dismayed him—and he sank back in his arm-chair with sombre looks and sullen mutterings.

"Sir Lucio Gualdi," said the Queen, "that we have once more to thank you for some great and signal service, is only too evident. But the wondrous announcements you have made, Sir Knight, have been so startling and bewildering, that they have excited us all to a degree which hath left us little power over our own reason. I pray you, therefore, to explain circumstantially the full measure of the service for which we are beholden unto thee."

"Suffer me to inform your Highness in a few words," responded Sir Lucio, "that it came to my knowledge how at a particular hour this evening, a certain emissary of the English Queen was to enter Edinburgh, attended by only two servitors, bearing amongst them no less a sum than five thousand pounds, destined for the use of the faction now in arms against your Grace. I resolved upon taking measures to intercept the party. I did so—with these results—that while Master Tamworth himself now kneels in your royal presence, his two followers lie somewhat grievously wounded at a cottage on the outskirts of the city,

and the gold is about to be placed at the feet of your Highness."

With these words, Sir Lucio turned and opened the private door by which he had made bold to enter the boudoir; and his gallant young page, Oliver Dunsyre, entered, bearing six heavy bags, slung two and two together for the convenience of being carried across the saddles of the three persons who had brought the treasure into Scotland. With a profound reverence Oliver proceeded to deposit the bags at the Queen's feet; and as he laid them there, they sent forth the unmistakable metallic sound which betokened their valuable contents. King Henry seemed to prick up his ears, and his eyes brightened, as if he were suddenly cheered somewhat from his sullenness by the hope of appropriating some portion of the treasure to his own purposes.

"Good youth," said the Queen to Oliver Dunsyre, "you have doubtless assisted in the chivalrous work which your noble-minded master has accomplished? But, Ah! there is blood upon your sleeve! You are wounded!"

"A mere scratch, gracious Queen," replied the page; "but even if it were more serious, it were lightly held by me when gained in such service."

"Tell me thy name, good youth," said the Queen; "and tell me likewise the names of the others who may have followed Sir Lucio Gualdi in his expedition—that I may bear in mind those whom in due course it will be my pleasure to reward."

"May it please your Grace," broke in Master Tamworth, "who was still kneeling upon the floor,

with his hands tied behind him, "the foreign Knight had no other follower than this young page; and though I may be supposed to owe them no favour, yet on the other hand I can admire valour and prowess even on the part of bitterest enemies. I am therefore free to confess that if the stripling and his master had not fought with a spirit that seemed preternatural, I should not now be kneeling here a suppliant for my life."

The importance of the evening's adventure was by no means deteriorated by this frank and outspoken declaration of the daring boldness with which it was undertaken and accomplished. The Queen, the Earl of Morton, Lord and Lady Erskine, David Rizzio, Mary Seaton, and Mary Douglas, all flung looks of admiration upon the Knight and his page. But the eyes of the King were rivetted upon the bags of gold; while Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming were whispering together very earnestly.

"If under such circumstances as these you were taken prisoner," said the Queen, addressing herself to Tamworth, "it is not I who shall claim a right to dispose either of your life or liberty. He to whose prowess you yielded, ought naturally to become the arbiter of your destiny. And it shall be so! Sir Lucio Gualdi, deal with this man as thou wilt."

The Knight bowed in acknowledgement of this token of the Queen's gratitude, and at once said to his page, "Unbind him, Oliver. Since his fate rests with me, I grant him his life—aye, and freedom to return at his leisure to his royal mistress the failure of his mission. Methinks

that he will receive punishment sufficient at her hands."

Master Tamworth rose up from his suppliant posture, as Oliver Dunsyre unbound the kerchief which was fastened to his wrists. Then bowing to the Queen, the English emissary said, "Those who serve monarchs are frequently compelled to perform duties but little consistent with their own feelings. Such is my case, gracious madam; and now that I have reason to experience the mercy of your Majesty's disposition, I can scarcely regret that my errand should have proved a failure. To you, Sir Lucio Gualdi," added Tamworth, turning with courteous salutation towards our hero, "I can only say that I owe you all which man can possibly owe unto man—namely, a life!"

Tamworth was a gentleman of good breeding, and by no means devoid of proper feelings, though one of the astutest and most trusty of the secret diplomatic agents employed by the unscrupulous Elizabeth of England. But there was a deep sincerity in the tone and manner in which Tamworth had just spoken; for he recollected that as a friend and abettor of the rebels then in arms against the Queen of Scotland, he had rendered himself liable to the fate of a spy—to be hanged without benefit of clergy. Yet his life had been spared—his liberty was restored to him—and he had therefore much indeed to be grateful for!

He was about to quit the room, when the young King, who was again in a humour for interference, cried out, "Stop! the fellow must not depart yet! We have many things to learn."

The fact is, the young King detested though he feared Gualdi: he was envious and jealous of him, and was therefore deeply nettled at seeing him have his own way in respect to the disposal of the English emissary's fate. He did not dare openly to insult Gualdi; but he thought that an opportunity now presented itself for dealing a side-blow at our hero.

"Now, sirrah," continued the King, as Tamworth halted in obedience to the command so peremptorily issued, "answer me a few questions. To whom were you to deliver this gold? to whose care were you to consign it in Edinburgh? through what channels was it to reach the rebels? We must know all these facts before we think of parting with you."

"I am already in possession of all the requisite information on these points," interposed Sir Lucio Gualdi, with that calm courtesy which was in itself a rebuke to the King's intermeddling.

"It were impossible to conceive," said the Queen, "that so wise and prudent a Knight as Sir Lucio Gualdi could have failed to possess himself of such details as those."

"Then let us hear them," said the King, in a petulant tone.

The Queen made a signal for Master Tamworth to retire; and the English emissary accordingly quitted the boudoir without experiencing any further attempt at detention on the part of the King. Oliver Dunsyre also withdrew; and the Queen desired Sir Lucio Gualdi to seat himself at the table and partake of refreshments. The Knight quaffed a goblet of wine, for he was indeed athirst

after the evening's enterprise ; and then without loss of time, he said to the Queen. "It is now my duty to explain fully unto your Highness how I obtained that information which led me to undertake the task of intercepting the emissary whom Elizabeth of England was sending with such important succours for the rebel cause."

The looks of all present expressed the deepest interest ; for let it be borne in mind that even Mary Douglas herself was not entirely acquainted with all the particulars that Sir Lucio had now to unfold.

"At a somewhat early hour this morning," proceeded our hero, "I happened to pick up—no matter how or where—this satchel-purse : " and the Knight laid it upon the table.

There was a slight movement on the part of Mary Beaton ; and she hastily whispered something to her friend Mary Fleming.

"This satchel-purse," resumed Gualdi, "was found to contain divers documents written in cipher. I discovered, by certain tests and experiments, a key to the reading of the most important of these documents. I wrote them out in the fair and intelligible language which the mystic hieroglyphics were intended to represent. There," proceeded Gualdi, opening a paper upon the table, "is the exact transcription of the particular document which specially relates to the incident of this evening. It is from Sir William Cecil, the English Secretary of State, Queen Elizabeth's confidential minister."

"Ah !" said Mary Stuart ; "this ought to be of importance ! But to think that my royal cousin or

England could have carried her rancour and hatred so far as to seek to send aids and subsidies unto the rebels who are in arms against me !"

"I think your Grace has derived the greatest advantage from the proceeding," observed the Earl of Morton, glancing down upon the bags of gold upon the floor.

"True !" said the Queen. "But proceed, good Sir Lucio ; and be kind enough to read out the contents of that document."

"It bears date the 10th of August," said the Knight.

"And this is the 20th," remarked the Queen. "Proceed, Sir Lucio. How runs the despatch ?"

"In this wise, gracious madam ; " and then our hero went on to read as follows :—

WHITEHALL, August 10, 1565.

"You will be pleased to learn that the spirit of her Gracious Majesty continues in sympathy with those patriotic nobles and gentlemen of Scotland who are prepared at all hazards, personally and individually, to defend with arms the reformed Church which is threatened in the said kingdom of Scotland by the further proof which the Queen of Scots hath given for her preference unto the Roman Catholic Faith, by espousing one who openly professeth that creed. Queen Elizabeth, as the Protestant Sovereign of England, can never be insensible with regard to the best interests of those who avow the same belief in the neighbouring kingdom of Scotland. Now, therefore, hath she listened to the prayer of the Lords Murray, Argyll, and others ; and her Highness hath resolved to meet their petition graciously. To this end I am commanded to take

prompt and secret measures to remit into Scotland for the aid of the said lords and their partisans, the sum of five thousand pounds in golden coin. After due consideration, I have selected the good and trusty gentleman, Master Tamworth, to be the bearer of this subsidy. He will travel with but two servitors, in order that no special attention may be drawn unto him—his mission being, for obvious reasons, most private and secret. On his arrival in Edinburgh he will proceed straight to your abode, where it would be convenient if at the very moment of his arrival you would take care that there should be some safe and trusty person on the part of the Associate Lords to receive the coin. And in order that these and other requisite arrangements for the prompt and secret management of the affair may be settled by your intelligence in the most precise and accurate manner, it is my purpose to instruct Master Tamworth so to regulate the time occupied by his journey that he may enter the city of Edinburgh at precisely nine o'clock in the evening of the twentieth day of this present month of August. Meanwhile I send off this despatch by a fleet messenger, that it may reach you in good time, leaving you at least three or four clear days to settle the needful arrangements for the carrying out of the above instructions, and for the reception of Master Tamworth at the precise hour and minute.

"So heaven keep you in this as in other things !

"Your faithful friend,"

"WILLIAM CECIL."

Queen Mary Stuart listened in the deepest silence to the reading

of this document : but the changing colour of her cheeks more than once showed how deep was her sense of the dark, designing, perfidious conduct of the Queen of England. The Earl of Morton and Lord Erskine could scarcely restrain indignant ejaculations ; and indeed it was only through the strictness of the rules of Court etiquette, and respect for their Sovereign that they kept the seal of silence upon their lips. The young King listened in mingled wonderment and consternation ; for even his natural levity and flippancy were overawed by a sense of the ominous gravity of the part which Elizabeth of England was adopting towards Scotland. Lady Erskine and Mary Seaton gazed with anxiety and suspense upon their royal mistress : Mary Douglas looked with admiration and confidence upon Gualdi : Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming exchanged peculiar and furtive looks. As for David Rizzio, he remained leaning against a side-board, buried in profound reflection.

A deep silence of upwards of a minute followed the reading of the above remarkable document ; and at length the Queen said, "There can indeed be no doubt of the determined hostility of my cousin Elizabeth of England towards me. For want of a positive and direct reason for declaring war, she seeks to undermine me by means of her gold !"

"But to whom was that letter addressed ?" inquired the young King.

"That fact does not appear upon the face of the original document in cipher," answered Gualdi : "but the moment I first read it, I expe-

rienced little difficulty informing a conjecture. And yet I hesitated to arrive at a positive conclusion ; but all doubt has since been cleared up, and surmise has been changed into certainty, by the admissions which I extorted from the lips of the emissary Tamworth."

"And if I also may venture to form a conjecture," remarked the Queen, "I should say that even diplomacy itself is being dishonoured by undertaking to play the part of a secret perfidiousness."

"Then to whom *was* the letter addressed?" demanded King Henry, petulantly. "You all talk in enigmas!—But, Ah! by heaven, that satchel-purse! I recognise it! To be sure! I saw it last night in the hands of some one who was playing with me in the pavilion."

"That satchel-purse contained the document which I have deciphered and transcribed," said Gualdi ; "and the document itself, according to the admission of Tamworth, was addressed to Sir Thomas Randolph."

Here Mary Beaton whispered in the lowest possible tone to Mary Fleming, "I was right, you see! I was right! I recognised the satchel-purse in a moment!"

"Yes!" the young King was crying aloud at the same time ; "It was in Randolph's hand that I saw it! I now remember well! He drew it forth to enter upon the tablets some memorandum of a wager about a forthcoming match of falconry. My diamond agraffe against twenty piece of gold!—that was the game!"

"Here is the vety entry of the wager," said Sir Kashig. Rescued by the tablets in the satchel-purse. "K."

H., diamond agraffe against my twenty broad pieces."

"And K. H. stands for *King Henry*," said the Earl of Morton. "Here are the most undeniable proofs of the fact that Sir Thomas Randolph is not merely the ambassador of the Queen of England to the Scottish Court, but that he is likewise the agent of his Queen's subtle treacheries."

"Yes," said Lord Erskine. "Sir Thomas Randolph is in league with the enemies of your Highness—he is evidently in correspondence with the rebels who have taken up arms against your Grace, and he acts as a go-between for the transmission of funds to the headquarters of the revolt. Therefore," added the nobleman, solemnly, "according to the law of nations, Sir Thomas Randolph has divested himself by his own foul acts of the sacred character of an ambassador, and has become liable to that self-same fate from which the lesser villain Tamworth was just now permitted to escape."

Mary Beaton became pale as death as she thus learnt the perilous position in which her lover had placed himself ; but she raised her kerchief to her countenance to conceal her emotion, while her friend Mary Fleming in a hurried and anxious whisper entreated her to be calm.

"Depend upon it," cried the young King, "Killigrew is as bad as Randolph! They are two arch knaves together—and we will hang them both to-morrow morning at the Market Cross."

It was now Mary Fleming's turn to be filled with consternation and affright, on account of the object

of her own affections, the handsome and accomplished Sir Henry Killigrew; while on the other hand, it was now Mary Beaton's turn to whisper hurried and anxious words of entreaty and caution in her friend's ear.

"Yes, by heaven!" repeated King Henry, "we will hang both the villains at the Market Cross! But first they shall give me back all I have lost to them at play; for rogues in politics cannot be otherwise than sharpers at cards. To the gibbet with them!"

"For heaven's sake leave the room on some pretext," whispered Mary Fleming to her intimate friend; "send and warn them!"

"Hush!—impossible!" interrupted Mary Beaton, also in a low but excited whisper. "Look how Gualdi eyes us ever and anon! I tremble at that man! He seems as if he could read the secrets of every heart!"

Meanwhile, Queen Mary began to speak; and her words calmed somewhat the fluttering hearts and perturbed spirits of the two Maids of Honour who were so deeply interested in everything which concerned the two English envoys.

"Henry," said Mary Stuart, "be not thus rash and precipitate. Would you have us provoke the Queen of England to the uttermost? Remember that she holds Margaret Countess of Lennox, your revered and beloved mother, a prisoner in the Tower of London. Remember likewise that she has confiscated your father's English estates. And thirdly, bear in mind that she yearns day and night for me to afford her some pretext to declare war against Scotland. What, therefore, are the objects

which must mainly guide our policy? Have we not to procure the freedom of your mother? Have we not to obtain the release of your sire's broad English acres from the ban of sequestration? and have we not to study continuously how to avoid affording Elizabeth a semblance of a pretence for proclaiming open hostilities against Scotland? So long as we maintain ourselves in the right, we place Elizabeth of England in the wrong in the view of all Europe. Think you, Henry, that I feel not the injuries whereof she is guilty towards me? Aye, keenly and bitterly do they rankle in my soul! But for the present I must suffer impatience. With rebellion at our very doors, it were madness to provoke a war with England. It was but an hour ago we were driven to despair for the means of raising this comparatively poor sum which lies here at my feet:—to what straits, therefore, should we be reduced if suddenly called upon to find ten times that amount for the maintenance of an army sufficient to meet the hosts which Elizabeth could pour against us over the Borders? What would our crowns be worth in such a case, Henry?"

"True, true!" said the young King, who was always filled with affright when the probable loss of his diadem was hinted at: then suddenly reflecting that the selfish nature of his fears might be seen through, he hastened to add, "But what you have said about my dear mother affects me most. I suppose, therefore, that in order to keep peace with England we must forego the pleasure of seeing Randolph and Killigrew hanged at the Market Cross. But, ah! what about this

affair of Tamworth? Will it not embroil us with England all the same, even though we leave the other two rascals unpunished?"

"Not so," rejoined the Queen. "Elizabeth of England would not dare make that circumstance a pretext for war. It would render her infamous in the eyes of all the world. Think you not, worthy Master David, that it is even as I state?"

"It is doubtless so, gracious madam," answered Rizzio. "The Queen of England would rather repudiate and disavow Tamworth altogether, than acknowledge that he was veritably her agent in such a nefarious proceeding. But it would be different if you were to do violence to her openly-acknowledged and accredited ambassadors Randolph and Killigrew. In that case Elizabeth of England would be compelled to meet the affair with a bold effrontery in order to avenge them."

"What thinks my Lord of Morton upon the point?" asked the Queen.

The proud Lord Chancellor of Scotland distained to make the slightest allusion to David Rizzio, whom he only tolerated but was far from liking; and he therefore said, "I agree with all the sentiments expressed so ably by your gracious Highness, to the effect that it were more prudent to maintain peace with England, so long as the honour of Scotland be not openly or flagrantly outraged."

Lord Erskine expressed a similar opinion; and the Queen then asked, "What saith our faithful friend, Sir Lucio Gualdi?"

"I feel confident," responded our hero, "that if your Highness

be resolved upon throwing the veil of secrecy over all the facts connected with this mission of Tamworth, the Queen of England will be only too glad to leave that veil undisturbed. Moreover, under all circumstances, I should earnestly counsel the observance of this pacific course. As for the documents which have fallen into my possession, as well as this satchel-purse, if your Majesty will be pleased to allow that the articles remain at my disposal, I shall not make an evil use of them."

"By all means, Sir Lucio," was Queen Mary's unhesitating reply, "deal with those articles according to your discretion. We will never put a question to you on the subject until such time as you may think fit to explain the matter wherein you have dealt with them."

"There is another point," suggested Lord Erskine, "which I most respectfully submit to the attention of your Highness."

"Proceed, my lord," said the Queen.

"It is to be presumed," continued Erskine, that Tamworth has already made his way to the abode of Randolph and Killigrew, to acquaint them with the circumstances of his discomfiture. The two envoys cannot therefore fail to understand in how dangerous a position they have placed themselves. Perhaps they dread the very worst from the righteous vengeance of your Grace:—they may even already be preparing for flight; and if they should thus precipitately leave Scotland, an inevitable publicity will immediately be given to the whole affair, and the Queen of England must perforce assume the attitude of one who is right in order

to prove to the world that she is not in the wrong. Her course would under such circumstances be to disavow Tamworth—to declare the despatch in cipher to be a forgery—to repel with scorn the notion that she could lend herself to the cause of the Scottish rebels and finally to make war against your Highness. To avert therefore all these disasters, it were well if Randolph and Killigrew were at once given to understand that your Majesty is most graciously pleased to overlook this fresh injury on the part of your royal cousin, Queen Elizabeth of England.”

“Well and wisely suggested, my lord,” said the Queen. “And if we might venture to impose this task upon Sir Lucio Gualdi, we think that under all circumstances it were better performed by him than by another.”

“I cheerfully undertake it,” said the Knight, “and will speed at once to the accomplishment of the task—although I have little doubt that Randolph and Killigrew would speedily learn from other sources the resolve to which your Grace has come.”

He glanced for an instant as he spoke at Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming; and though the look was so rapid and transient as to escape the notice of the other personages present, it was nevertheless so significant as to carry consternation and dismay to the hearts of those two young ladies.

“I mean,” added Gualdi, perceiving that his remark had surprised the Queen and some others present,—“I mean that there is truth in the proverb which says ‘walls have ears,’ and that nothing could be likely to escape the know-

ledge of such crafty politicians as the English envoys.”

Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming now breathed more freely; and they exchanged glances as much as to ask each other, “What did he mean by looking so strangely at us? could he have intended to point the hidden shaft of accusation at us?”

But Sir Lucio, having bowed to the Queen, was already quitting the boudoir; and, descending the private staircase, he traversed a passage which ran close by the entrance of the chapel, and which afterwards became memorable in the tremendous tragedy connected with the end of David Rizzio.

In a few moments, Sir Lucio was outside the palace walls; and he made his way at a quick pace towards the lodgings which were occupied by Sir Thomas Randolph and Sir Henry Killigrew, at no great distance.

The house, which was a large one, may be described as a sort of private hostelry or hotel, each flat or storey containing a separate suite of apartments with its own private door upon the landing of the staircase which was common to them all. The gates of the entrance-hall were closed when Gualdi reached the dwelling; for it was now past eleven o'clock at night: but his summons at the bell was immediately answered by a porter, who opened a wicket through which the light from a lamp inside at once shone forth upon our hero's person.

“I would fain have speech with His Excellency Sir Thomas Randolph,” he said.

“Certainly, Sir Knight,” was the prompt reply given by the porter, who at once caught a glimpse of

the golden spurs upon our hero's heels. "What name shall I have the honour of announcing?"

The Knight at once comprehended the real aspect of affairs: he saw that there was no need to make any mystery of his name; and he therefore replied, "You may announce me as Sir Lucio Gualdi."

The porter bowed low as to one of whom he had heard honourable mention made; and he immediately led the way up a wide handsome staircase to the first floor.

"I see how it is," thought Sir Lucio to himself. "The English envoys mean to carry the matter with a high hand, or else with a cool effrontery. They expected some kind of visit or message on the part of the Court; and they had prepared themselves to receive either with as much readiness and unconcern as if they themselves had nothing to apprehend."

The door upon the landing was opened by a page in elegant costume, and to whom the porter announced Sir Lucio Gualdi. The page bowed with profoundest respect; and at once throwing open an inner door at the end of a little lobby or ante-chamber, repeated the announcement—"Sir Lucio Gualdi!"

At a table in a large and handsomely-furnished apartment, sat Randolph and Killigrew. Wine and fruit were before them; they were engaged in play—or at least seemed to have been; and each laid down his cards as our hero was announced. Sir Lucio thought to himself, as a sequence to his former reflections, "The scene is well got up; these Scotch fellows are playing their part admirably!—but

still they will find that it is not *quite* effective!"

"Welcome, gallant Knight," said Randolph, with that calm and well-bred courtesy which distinguished him.

"You honour us with this visit—although the hour be somewhat late."

"Pray be seated, Sir Lucio," said Killigrew, setting forward a chair with a more officious degree of politeness than that which the elder diplomatist chose to display.

"My business need not occupy many minutes, fair sirs," answered our hero, declining with a cold and distant salutation the proffered seat; "and I will explain myself without further preface. There are four special points to which I crave your attention——"

"Ah, then it is business which has brought you hither, Sir Knight?" said Randolph, with a well-feigned air of surprise.

"At this hour," added Killigrew, "when we were just about to play our last game ere retiring to rest?"

"Ah, gentlemen," said our hero, "you know full well that your last game has proved a losing one!"

"As a matter of course," observed Randolph, as he trifled with the cards upon the table, "there must be a loser at every game. But then there is a winner too, and methinks that I have beaten my friend Killigrew at every hand this evening."

"Sir Thomas Randolph," interrupted Gualdi, who could scarcely repress a smile at the cool effrontery and admirably-assumed air of careless listlessness with which the wily diplomatist was fencing with the matter;—"Sir Thomas Randolph, the game to which I allude is one in which Queens have been

playing ; but the Queen of Scotland has been enabled to outwit the Queen of England ! This you already know."

"My dear Killigrew," asked Randolph, with an air of astonishment "what on earth does this worthy Knight mean ?"

"Ah, what does he mean ?" exclaimed Killigrew. "The two Queens playing at cards ! Ha, ha !—the joke may be a good one, but may I perish if I can discern its point."

"Perhaps, gentlemen," said Gualdi, with the utmost calmness, "you will deny all knowledge of a certain Master Tamworth ?"

"Tamworth ?" said Randolph. "Never knew such a person ?"

"There is an English town of such a name," said Killigrew ; "but——"

"And a certain sum of five thousand pounds," asked Gualdi ; "know you naught of *that* ?—have you not already cursed the misadventure which has turned the golden flood into another channel ?"

Randolph and Killigrew looked at each other, shrugged their shoulders, and shook their heads, as much as to imply that they thought the Knight's brain was disordered and that his wits had gone a wool-gathering.

"Peradventure, Sir Thomas," continued Gualdi, "you have not lost your satchel-purse ?"

"Certainly not. Or at least I hope not !" ejaculated Randolph. "No, to be sure ! here it is !"—and he produced one from the pocket of his doublet.

"No—I mean *this one* !" exclaimed Gualdi, producing the satchel-purse which he had found, and laying it upon the table.

"It is not mine," said Randolph, coolly.

"But the King vows that he saw it in your hand," cried Gualdi, "last night, in the pavilion !"

Randolph shrugged his shoulders, and said, "The King mistakes. Besides, he was tipsy—and moreover he is reckless in his assertions."

"But this entry of a wager which you made," continued Gualdi. "Look ! the King's agraffe against your twenty pieces of gold ! is that your writing ?"

"No. Besides, I never laid such a wager," answered Randolph. "Killigrew sat by me all the evening, and he can vouch——"

"Oh, I am prepared to attest that no such wager was made," ejaculated the junior diplomatist, who displayed as perfect an aptitude for a falsehood as his superior.

"And therefore," continued Gualdi, scarcely able to keep his temper any longer, "I am to suppose that you are equally innocent of any knowledge concerning these documents written in cipher and which were contained in this satchel-purse ?"

Randolph affected just to cast a single glance at the papers which our hero displayed ; and with another contemptuous shrug of his shoulders, he said, "We never use that sort of cipher."

"But Sir William Cecil does," said Gualdi, impressively.

"It may be so—you may know best, Sir Knight : but to my own knowledge——"

"Will you deny," broke in Gualdi, "that Tamworth himself has told you how he confessed unto me that this document from Sir

William Cecil had been transmitted to you, Sir Thomas Randolph?"

"Tamworth again? Tamworth?" interrupted Randolph. "I tell you I know not the man! If some adventurer has been imposing upon you, Sir Knight—or if in these troublous times some dangerous and evil-designing persons have thought fit to deal in forged documents, and to make use of names which they have no warranty for bringing forward—it is not our fault."

"Come, gentlemen," exclaimed Gualdi, drawing himself up with dignity, "it were useless to trifle any farther with the subject."

"I agree with you, Sir Knight," responded Randolph, as he at once adopted a corresponding air of hauteur.

"We have borne with you thus long—"

"And you shall now bear with me for just so many minutes longer," interrupted Gualdi, "as may suffice for the announcements I have to make and the terms which I have to dictate. Listen, then, to the four points to which I have to direct your attention! The first is a message from the Queen of Scotland, graciously intimating her pleasure to view in a forgiving spirit the unfriendly and cruel conduct of the Queen of England towards her; so that for the same reason a merciful pardon is extended unto yourselves for the share which ye have had in the transactions whereunto I allude. That is the first point."

"It is very merciful of the Queen of Scotland," said Randolph, with a satirical air, "to forget and forgive offences that have never been committed. Perhaps your second point, Sir Knight, is equally amusing?"

"It is a stipulation," answered Gualdi, calmly but firmly. "Listen! This satchel-purse contains documents of the most damnatory character to the Queen of England, to Sir William Cecil, and to yourself, Sir Thomas Randolph. I will give them up only on the condition that Margaret Countess of Lennox be released from the Tower of London, so that the heart of Mary Stuart may be gladdened by beholding her husband's mother restored to freedom and to her family."

"The stipulation is a pleasant one," said Randolph, with a sneer.

"Perhaps the Knight's third point will prove still more edifying," interjected Killigrew, bowing with an air of mock-politeness.

"I will explain it, gentlemen," said Gualdi, preserving his unruffled air. "You, Sir Thomas Randolph, were ordered to have a trusty person in readiness at the moment of Tamworth's arrival, to receive the gold and convey it to the Associate Lords. I have no doubt that trusty person is still beneath your roof, and I demand an interview with him. I mean him no harm—and to this effect I pledge my word as a Knight and a gentleman."

"Verily, Sir Lucio," said Randolph, "you are taxing our patience sadly; and moreover your words are amounting to insults. There is no trusty person of the kind beneath my roof."

"Then you refuse your assent," said Gualdi, "to the stipulations I have laid down in respect to the release of the Countess of Lennox and the granting me an interview with the person who I maintain is now within these very walls?"

"By heavens, Sir Lucio," cried Randolph, affecting to lose all patience, "this is now pastbearing?"

"Stop!" interjected Gualdi; "and at least preserve your temper until you have heard my fourth point. It is this: that you, Sir Thomas Randolph—and you, Sir Henry Killigrew—do exert your influence within the space of twenty-four hours, to the effect that two persons now in the service of the Queen of Scotland shall resign their situations as the only means of saving themselves from being denounced as guilty of the blackest treacheries!"

"Despite all their diplomatic self-possession, Randolph and Killigrew started visibly and exchanged uneasy glances. But the next moment they recovered themselves; and Randolph asked, "To whom, Sir Knight, do you allude?—and what may be the names of the personages over whom you fancy that my comrade and myself possess such influence?"

"Those whom ye have succeeded in leading away from their allegiance to their royal mistress," rejoined Gualdi solemnly,—"those whom ye have taught to repay with blackest ingratitude the bounties showered upon them by queenly hands—those whom your insidious wiles have succeeded in converting into spies and traitresses—those two are Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming!"

Randolph and Killigrew now exchanged looks of irrepressible terror; but again they recovered their self-possession, both exclaiming, as if in one breath, "The proof! the proof!"

"It is here—amongst the other evidence of treason and treachery against the peace of Scotland's

Queen!" and Gualdi pointed to the satchel-purse. "Who gave the information at Perth, seven weeks ago, that the Queen was to start at five in the morning instead of ten in the forenoon? Who betrayed the altered plans of their royal mistress? The wretched girls whom I have named! Then, again, who was hovering in disguise about the spot to receive whatsoever intelligence might be useful to the conspirators? You, Sir Thomas Randolph! Who sent the warning billet to Murray at Lochleven? Again I say you, Sir Thomas Randolph! And now if there be the slightest spark of chivalry in your souls, ye wilt save Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming the crushing results of an exposure!"

Randolph and Killigrew exchanged rapid looks: Gualdi at once caught their sinister meaning; and laying his hand upon his sword, he said, "Ah, you are treacherous unto the very last!"—then again securing the satchel-purse about his person, he added, "Dare either of you make the slightest movement of a hostile nature towards me, and by heaven! there will be life-blood spilt that instant upon this floor!"

"Sir Lucio Gualdi," said Randolph, utterly discomfited and crestfallen, "we yield to your stipulations—we succumb in every respect! And first of all—"

"First of all," echoed Gualdi, give me a proof of your sincerity by affording me an immediate interview with the trusty person who was sent on behalf of the conspirators to receive the treasure from England."

"This way, Sir Knight," answered Randolph.

Thus speaking, he opened a door

at the extremity of the room : he led Gualdi through another apartment—then he opened an inner door, and said, "Walk on, Sir Knight."

Our hero crossed the threshold as he was bidden ; he entered a smaller sitting-room ; and there an individual started up from a seat at the sound of the opening of the door. But, Ah ! that page's dress—that lit the elegant figure which it invested—the black velvet cap, with its sable plume, upon the masses of ebon hair—those eyes—that countenance !—could it be possible ?—was it she as he had seen her disguised on the memorable night when she had assisted his escape from Lochleven ?

"Mary Douglas !" cried our hero : and he felt a horrible tightening at the heart, as if life itself were about to leave him.

CHAPTER XIV.

GEORGE DOUGLAS.

It was only for an instant that Sir Lucio Gualdi experienced the harrowing idea that it was possible for Mary Douglas to be an agent of the rebels. All in a moment his confidence in her returned ; and he felt indignant with himself at having lost faith in the beauteous maiden, though even for the most infinitesimal space of time. But now it was a sense of wonderment which seized upon him, when the conviction rushed into his mind that the person whom he beheld before him was not Mary Douglas at all, being of much taller stature ;

and the truth was at the same moment cleared up by Sir Thomas Randolph saying, "Master Douglas, this worthy Knight will explain his own purpose in seeking an interview with thee : but he has pledged his honour as a chevalier and a gentleman that he means thee no harm !"

Randolph then withdrew, closing the door behind him, and leaving our hero and Master Douglas alone together.

That the young gentleman was the brother of Mary Douglas, was evident enough from the remarkable family likeness which existed between them. Yet the brother was of taller stature, as we have already said ; and the general expression of his countenance was that of a hasty temperament and proud disposition, contrasting strongly with the feminine softness which habitually belonged to the features of his sister. His age might be about one-and-twenty ; but he looked younger, on account of the beardless condition of his face. His form was slender ; but it was of a perfect symmetry of proportions, with limbs well knit and adjusted, and in all its movements it denoted the mingling of that lithe activity, strength, and capacity for sudden effort which characterise the panther when springing upon a prey. We should add that he possessed large black eyes of an uncommon degree of lustre, and a remarkable redundancy of ebon hair ; while his cheeks were usually pale, like those of his sister—unless the excitement of passing circumstances caused the hot blood of the Douglas race to mantle glowingly upon the countenance.

So soon as Randolph had withdrawn from the room and closed the door behind him, Gualdi advanced towards this young gentleman, who stood cold and haughty, with his arms folded across his chest, and with an air which altogether denoted a proud defiance rather than suspense or curiosity.

"Sir Thomas Randolph," said Gualdi, in a tone of sufficient courtesy, "did but half perform the ceremony of introduction: but perhaps you know me by sight, fair sir?—and, therefore, he deemed it not necessary to mention my name."

"Whoever you may be, Sir Knight," was the answer, given with a cold politeness, "this is the first time that I have ever had the honour of beholding you—at least to my knowledge. Sir Thomas Randolph's mode of introducing you was, to say the least, as strange one; and I have yet to learn wherefore you have pledged your honour as a Knight and a gentleman that you mean me no harm."

"I need scarcely ask," pursued Gualdi, "whether you are a scion of the Douglas of Lochleven; for there is that family resemblance in your lineaments which proclaims the fact."

"Under whatsoever circumstances we now meet, and which have yet to be explained," rejoined the young gentleman, "I can have no hesitation in the avowal that your surmise relative to my lineage is correct. I bear the name of George Douglas: I am the eldest son of the late Sir William Douglas of Lochleven; and I may claim kinship amongst the highest and noblest in Scotland. I have now a right to ask that the frankness of

my own announcements may be requited with a like courtesy on your part."

"My name is perhaps not altogether unknown to you," answered our hero. "Permit me to announce myself as Sir Lucio Gualdi."

"Ah!" and all in a moment the countenance of George Douglas changed into an expression of fiercest rage, more vindictive and more terrible than that which his sister Mary had displayed when drawing her bright dagger upon our hero on the first occasion of their meeting in the vicinage of Kinross. "You are Sir Lucio Gualdi!" cried the young gentleman. "Then draw and defend yourself!"—and his own sword flashed from its sheath.

Though this was done in the twinkling of an eye, yet not more rapid was the movement than the proceeding which Gualdi adopted to meet it. One bound forward and the Knight, striking up the rash youth's weapon with his steel-clad arm, clutched the hilt and tore it from his grasp. It was the work of an instant; and Gualdi, be it understood, had not even thought fit to unsheath his own sword.

"Fair sir," he said, "you placed yourself at a disadvantage, by attacking one who is sheathed in steel. Take back your sword; and if you show me that I have in anything or at any time done wrong towards you, I promise you an opportunity for obtaining satisfaction on more equal terms. But let me hope that the result of explanations will be the establishment of friendly feelings betwixt us."

George Douglas was confounded by the suddenness with which he found himself standing disarmed,

powerless, and discomfited in the presence of the man whom he had all in a moment chosen to challenge as a foe to mortal combat. The fiery rage and fierce excitement of his countenance were subdued down into an air of wonderment and dismay, not altogether untinged with shame and mortification. But, like all men of proud-impetuous, and courageous disposition, George Douglas possessed certain generous feelings; and he quickly appreciated the handsome conduct of Gualdi in restoring him his sword and soothing his wounded pride by means of the words that accompanied the act.

"I accept my sword at your hands, Sir Knight," answered Douglas: "but need I remind you that it is as the brother of Mary Douglas that I sought to demand satisfaction at your hands?"

"And let me tell your, fair sir," responded Gualdi, with an honest glow upon his strikingly handsome countenance, "that I have so much respect for the name of Mary Douglas, I would shed the last drop of my blood in vindicating her honour, or in chastising the false caitiff who might dare to asperse it!"

"But what am I, as the brother of Mary Douglas," said George evidently undecided in what tone to continue the discourse,— "what am I to think of Sir Lucio Gualdi, who became a visitor to Lochleven Castle some seven weeks back or so—at the time that I myself lay stretched upon a bed of sickness—"

"Speak of me as a prisoner on the occasion, fair sir—and not as a visitor," interrupted our hero. "My captivity was foully and traitorously accomplished; and I had a

right to seize upon the first means that presented themselves for effecting my escape."

"But not a right to practise wily tamperings and subtle machinations with a maiden of gentle birth," cried George Douglas, excitedly,— "and that maiden my sister! To induce her to don the garb of a menial page for such a purpose—to purloin our half-brother Murray's signet-ring—to trick sentries, boat-keepers and grooms—"

"One word, Master Douglas!" broke in Sir Lucio. "It were better that you should know the precise truth as it stands, than that you should believe your sister capable of listening to treacherous hints or yielding to dishonouring tamperings on my part. Your sister was loyally devoted to the Queen's cause, and she of her own accord chose me as an agent to serve it. From all that followed, you must see that it was so; and even if you were ignorant thereof, it were useless to keep the secret, inasmuch as you must be well aware that your sister has been for weeks past in the Queen's household. Think you that it was without a pang your sister tore herself away from her home and her kindred on that memorable occasion which drove her in flight from Lochleven?—or think you that because circumstances have thus separated her from her mother, her brethren, and her sisters, that she has forgotten them? No, no! Rest assured, Master Douglas, that in your sister's bosom there has been many and many a severe struggle: betwixt loyalty to her Queen and affection towards her family! But, alas! in these sad and troublous times, it is the conflict of political interests and the antagonism of

creeds were destined to snap the tenderest bonds of affection, love, and kinship !”

“ Yes, Sir Knight—yes !” ejaculated George Douglas, in a hurried and excited manner. “ These are truths that force themselves upon the conviction ! These are laments which I have many times made in the depths of my own heart !”

“ If family ties must thus be broken,” pursued Gualdi, “ and the bonds of affection severed amidst these conflicts of jarring interests and opinions, it were at least as well to look as charitably as possible upon the motives which animate different individuals. For what is the spectacle which we have before us ? The Earl of Murray proclaiming warfare against his half-sister, the Queen !—while in the bosom of the Douglas family, *you* think fit to adopt the one side, and *your sister* deems it her duty to espouse the other ! If you assert a right to the exercise of your own judgment and the independence of your own action, may not your sister enjoy similar privileges ? And then, too, let me remind you, Master Douglas, that your sister experiences the completest approval of her own conscience, as well as an ineffable satisfaction, and a noble pride in serving the most admirable of Queens and the most interesting of women ! Instead of there being found hearts capable of plotting against such a Queen, every soul in Scotland ought to rejoice in possessing a Sovereign of stainless honour, unimpeachable virtue, brilliant accomplishments, and transcending loveliness !”

During all the latter portion of Gualdi's speech a strange excitement took hold of George Douglas ;

the colour went and came in quick transitions upon his countenance—his eyes vibrated like stars—his chest heaved—and a nervous quivering seemed to take possession of his limbs. At length, as our hero ceased speaking, the young man suddenly smote his breast with his clenched hand, exclaiming, “ By Heaven, 'tis true, Sir Knight—'tis true ! You speak like a prophet of God unto evil-doers ! Your words fill me with remorse ! Every syllable you utter pierces like a barbed arrow into my heart !”

Sir Lucio was astonished at this excitement, which, coming on so suddenly, seemed to increase so rapidly, and which so far transcended the effect which he could have supposed any appeal or remonstrance on his part capable of producing.

“ Say no more, Sir Knight ! say no more !” George Douglas went on to exclaim. “ Your words have excited feelings which if free rein be given unto them, will hurry me on into irredeemable madness !—And I have been mad in what I have done !”

“ My friend,” said Gualdi,—“ for thus I am sure you will permit me to call you ;”—and taking his hand he pressed it kindly,—“ I see with rejoicing that my words have not been lost upon you. You have departed from your allegiance to the Queen—and you repent it ! Nay, more !—if I can read your heart aright, you even envy your sister in the course which she has adopted—you think of her as being now in the service of that Queen, whom all persons, whether male or female, might be proud to serve ! Yes—and you are smitten with remorse at the reflection that you had cast

your fortunes amongst men who are blinded by their selfish interests or their prejudices to the thousand amiable qualities possessed by that Queen !”

“ Enough, enough !” interrupted George Douglas, stamping his foot as if in a sudden paroxysm of frenzy : “ you will drive me mad !” —and then suddenly throwing himself upon a seat, he covered his face with his hands and burst into tears.

It is always a moving and a saddening spectacle for one man to behold another weeping : it is indicative of some more than ordinary cause of distress when masculine strength of mind can dissolve into feminine weakness. But in this case the weeping was of so passionate a nature, the sobs were so deep, the anguish was so profound, that Gualdi was astonished and overawed :—he could not comprehend it, and he dared not intrude upon it.

And of a sudden, at the expiration of two or three minutes, George Douglas started up, dashed away his tears, and seizing Gualdi's hand, said, “ You despise me, Sir Knight !—you look upon me with contempt !”

“ On the contrary,” replied our hero, “ I experience a boundless sympathy towards you ; and if you will look upon me as a friend, there is nothing I would not do to serve you, and to merit your confidence !”

George Douglas turned away for a few moments—took two or three hurried paces across the room—and then abruptly stopping short before Gualdi, he said, “ Yes, you have a right to learn the cause of this emotion, since you have resolved to hold it in all its most fearful work-

ings !—Listen ! Two years ago my mother visited Edinburgh, where we remained for some months at the house of the Earl of Murray. My sister Mary and myself accompanied her ; and need I add that we were always welcome guests at Holyrood ? It was just at the time when David Rizzio had brought to such a perfect degree of training the chapel-choir, over which he presided ere he became private secretary to the Queen. My sister Mary has an exquisite taste for music ; and the Queen desired that she should cultivate it under the tutelage of Rizzio. Therefore, daily at that time did I escort my sister to Holyrood, to receive the instructions of that old man, whom I believe to be a worthy one ;—and while the lessons lasted I was honoured with admission into the Queen's presence. I sat amongst the other visitors or guests, listening to the melody of her voice, gazing upon her beauteous countenance—sometimes dazzled by the brilliancy of her wit—at others charmed by the instructive character of her discourse. Her Grace discovered that I had a taste for poetry : she was pleased to say that I read it with feeling and fluency ; and she often asked me to read passages from the works of her favourite poets for the amusement of herself, her ladies, and her courtiers. And now, Sir Lucio Gualdi, you will cease to have any sympathy with me—your friendship will turn into scorn and contempt—you will laugh at me, or you will spurn me, when I tell you that I went on drinking of a honied cup without dreaming of its intoxicating quality, and that I plunged headlong into delicious

reveries and enthusiastic imaginings, creating for myself a paradise wherein I wandered like one in an ecstatic dream ! Because Mary Stuart treated me with kindness and with favour, I was bold and mad and fatuous enough to fancy that she regarded me with more tender sentiments ! I loved her as never man loved !—and yet the secret of this passion of mine was never betrayed by my looks or by my words ! To no human ear have I ever breathed it until *now* that I impart it unto thine ! When my mother's visit to Edinburgh ended, and my sister Mary and myself accompanied her back to Lochleven, I still cherished that secret passion—still indulged in the insane hope that it was reciprocated ! Time wore on—and all of a sudden I was startled from that dream, as suddenly and as fearfully as the sleeper is roused by a thunder-clap in the dead of night ! I awoke from my blissful reverie, to find that it was all a baseless vision : my self-created paradise had vanished—and I stood as it were in the midst of a cheerless desert ! For the rumour reached my ear that the Queen had secretly accepted the plight of Darnley !—And now, Sir Lucio, to make an end of this story, so sad for me to tell—so absurd for you to hear—let me ask whether you cannot understand how it was that my mind fell into such a morbid state that it led me to look upon myself as an injured person, and that in brooding over my imaginary wrongs I began to hate where I had once loved, and to think of vengeance where I had been wont to worship with adoration ! Envy and jealousy took possession of my soul in respect to

Darnley; and in such a frame of mind I was easily led to listen with an attentive ear when my half-brother James—the Earl of Murray, I mean—began to whisper concerning plots and conspiracies—I need say no more. I have been mad, but your words have brought me back to my senses ! I had steeled my heart against all compunction—but your words have melted it into remorseful feelings ! I am an altered man, Sir Lucio—and illimitable is the debt of gratitude that I owe you for this conversion that you have wrought ! But never, never—I implore you !—never let the secret which I have now revealed go forth from your lip !”

“Never, my friend ! never !” exclaimed Gualdi,—“so long as you bid me keep the seal of silence upon it ! At the same time you will permit me to tell your sister that I have seen you, and that henceforth you will take no part in plot, conspiracy, or treason against Mary Stuart ?”

“Yes—tell my sister this,” said the young gentleman ; “and bid her have no fear of my conduct for the future ! But now let me ask you, Sir Knight, wherefore you sought the present interview, and whom did you expect to meet in this apartment !”

“You are of course aware,” responded Gualdi, “that everything has been discovered in reference to the mission of Tamworth—that the gold has been intercepted.—”

“Yes—through your matchless valour, Sir Lucio, rejoined Douglas. “The unfortunate Tamworth came, crestfallen and dismayed, to report the result of an adventure so little anticipated or foreseen. Scarcely

had he told his tale, when he was seized with a dizziness or vertigo, and it was found necessary to send for the leech to bleed him."

"And then," said Gualdi, "Randolph and Killigrew determined to put a bold face upon the matter, and disavow everything under whatever circumstances might ensue?—was it not so?"

"It was," answered Douglas.

"And you, my friend," proceeded Gualdi, "decided upon tarrying here a little while—a few hours perhaps—in order to see what steps might be taken by the Queen, so that you should be enabled to return to the conspirators and make a full report of the precise attitude of the Court and the general aspect of affairs;—was not this so likewise?"

"It was, Sir Knight," again answered Douglas.

"I felt convinced," continued our hero, "that such would be the case; and therefore I stipulated with Randolph and Killigrew for an interview with the *trusty person* whom I knew to be here on the part of the conspirators. Hence my abrupt introduction to this apartment: but little indeed did I expect to meet the brother of Mary Douglas!"

"It would seem, Sir Lucio," said the young gentleman, "that Randolph and Killigrew are completely in your power; or else they would not have yielded to your demand for an interview with the agent of the Associate Lords, whoever he might be. How was it that they failed to put a good face upon the matter, to ignore and repudiate—to disavow and deny——"

"They knew not at first how," answered our hero, "that they were completely in my power,"

responded Gualdi, "nor to what an extent I had fathomed their iniquities. To be brief, they succumbed completely; and if I had chosen to humiliate them to the uttermost, I might have reduced them to the abject position of suppliants at my feet."

"But you have yet to tell me, Sir Knight," remarked Douglas; "wherefore you sought this interview with me, though ignorant who it was you were about to meet."

"I will tell you," said Gualdi. "Listen attentively. I had resolved—for certain reasons of my own—to set out with the least possible delay, and pay a visit to the Earl of Murray, wheresoever he might be found."

"The Earl of Murray! my half-brother!" ejaculated Douglas.

"The same," replied Gualdi, with his habitual calmness. "I flatter myself that such an interview might not be without its uses and advantages in more ways than one. In a word, Master Douglas, the present rebellion is certain to be suppressed—the Queen's cause will prove triumphant—and it would please me if I might become the means of saving the Earl of Murray from exile—perhaps indeed from the scaffold!"

"Noble-hearted Knight that you are!" ejaculated George Douglas, enthusiastically. "But you know not the Earl of Murray! Remember that you have twice vanquished him—twice humiliated him by defeat! Remember likewise that in every way you have frustrated and baffled him! You escaped from Lochleven—you gathered succours for Mary Stuart—you saved her from captivity in the ravine—then by means of admir

able stratagems you prevented Argyll and Chatelherault from striking the blows which Murray himself had missed to deal effectively;—and therefore he bears no love for you, Sir Knight! It were madness, on your part to seek his presence!”

“You forget, my friend,” said Gualdi, “that I hold possession of the Earl’s signet-ring—that he gave it me as the pledge of a debt of gratitude—and that he would be dishonoured as a noble, a knight, and a gentleman for evermore, if he were to deny or disavow that obligation!”

“But then,” said George Douglas, shaking his head dubiously. “the Earl gave you that ring, Sir Knight, when the vizor was over your countenance and he knew not who you were; but he was not long in discovering, to his indescribable mortification, that it was none other than Sir Lucio Gualdi who had obtained possession of that ring, and who lost no time in making use of it to frustrate the plans of Argyll and Chatelherault.”

“All stratagems are fair in war, my friend,” said Gualdi, smiling; “and though I used the ring for the purposes you name, yet do I still retain it as the gage of a deep debt or gratitude owing unto me by the Earl of Murray. He will not ignore the pledge:—all the most solemn laws of chivalry would compel him to recognise it. Besides, my purpose in seeking him may prove most advantageous to himself. Therefore, my resolve is taken:—indeed it was already fixed before you raised your kindly meant objections.”

“Then, doubtless,” observed George Douglas, “you seek my aid in the matter?”

“Precisely so,” answered Gualdi. “This report has reached Edinburgh this night that the conspirators have gathered a large force at Ayr: but whether the Earl of Murray be with them, I know not. At all events, it occurred to me that there would be some special trysting-place appointed for the delivery of the expected treasure of English gold into the hands of the Associate Lords. All I now ask is, therefore, is that you will tell me where, with the least possible delay, I may be sure of falling in with the Earl of Murray?”

“Let me at once inform you, Sir Knight,” said Douglas, “that although I from this moment renounce all hostility and enmity against the Queen, yet on the other hand I will not in any sense betray my half-brother or his confederates.

“And I, Master Douglas, should scorn the bare idea of asking you to play such a part. If I were proposing to ride forth at the head of a thousand men to seek an interview with the Earl of Murray, you might well refuse to direct or guide me to the spot where I may find him. But inasmuch as I propose to set out with but a single attendant—revealing my project to none —”

“Enough, Sir Knight!” interrupted George Douglas: “the word of such a man as you is better than the oaths of thousand! I will be your guide to the trysting-place appointed for me to meet the Earl of Murray to-morrow. It was my intention to set out at a somewhat early hour in the morning, and under circumstances of privacy, as you may suppose; for ’tis with

that object I wear this costume of a page——"

"Your time shall be mine," said Gualdi; "and in order that the privacy you speak of may be maintained, I will not propose to join you until you have left the city of Edinburgh at a suitable distance behind. Fix the hour and name the spot where we shall meet."

"I will leave to you, Sir Knight," responded Douglas, "the main road which leads across the Pentland Hills. There, at a distance of some six miles or so from Edinburgh, stands St. Paul's Cross by the side of a rippling stream; and that is the spot where I will meet thee at six o'clock in the morning."

"Be it so," responded Gualdi. "I will be punctual. But one more word ere we part! What explanation shall you presently give to the English envoys relative to the nature of this interview which has now taken place between us?"

"You may easily comprehend, Sir Lucio, that I can have none to give. Therefore you would oblige me by enjoining me to strictest silence."

"I comprehend," said the Knight, with a smile: "you are in my power—and you must obey me? Well then, I enjoin you to silence. And now farewell, Master Douglas, until we meet amongst the Pentland Hills. I shall set out from Holyrood precisely at five o'clock, attended only by my faithful young page Oliver Dunsyre. And now, farewell for the present."

"Farewell, Sir Knight," said George Douglas, warmly clasping the hand which was proffered him.

Here we must interrupt the thread of our narrative for a brief space, while we place on record a

little incident which is necessary for the better explanation of certain adventures which are to follow.

When Sir Thomas Randolph had introduced Sir Lucio Gualdi to the apartment occupied by George Douglas, he returned to the sitting-room where he had left Sir Henry Killigrew; and there these two worthies at once began to talk over the various points which so specially concerned them. We need not however detail at any length the conversation which thus ensued; but we will give the concluding portion of it, which alone is necessary for the purposes of our narrative.

"It will indeed prove terribly heartbreaking for those two poor girls!" said Randolph. "Besides," he added, with true diplomatic selfishness, "we shall lose their assistance as spies in the very bosom of the Court!"

"But what is to be done?" asked Killigrew. "There was a moment when I looked at you—and if you had given an affirmative nod, I would have drawn upon Gualdi——"

"Precisely the meaning of the look which I threw upon you!" interjected Randolph. "Why, my good friend, if we had both drawn our swords at the moment and fallen upon him, we might have overpowered him—that cursed satchel-purse would have fallen into our hands—we should have destroyed it—and we might in that case have defied him to prove the complicity of the two girls. Without such evidence the Queen would never believe anything to the prejudice of two of her favourite Maies."

"Well, well," interrupted Killigrew, impatiently, "but the satchel-purse is *not* destroyed, and Gualdi still holds us completely in his power. Come, confess the truth, Randolph! You liked not the idea of hazarding a combat with one who laid his hand so quickly upon his sword and dared you to draw your own?"

"By heaven, Sir Henry Killigrew!" cried Randolph, angrily, "it was you who quailed and were frightened.—"

"Let us be frank," interrupted the junior diplomatist, "and mutually avow that we thought it more prudent to avoid a conflict with Gualdi, after the account of his prowess which we received from the lips of poor Tamworth. For if we really found ourselves in a fighting mood, it were easy to intercept him presently when he comes forth from his interview with young Douglas."

"No, no!" said Randolph, "the noise—the scandal!—all things considered, it would never do! And if we failed to take his life, 'twould only complicate matters more seriously.—But, Ah! I wonder what on earth he can have to say at this length to George Douglas?"

As he thus spoke, Randolph rose from his seat, traversed on tiptoe the inner apartment, and then cautiously applied his ear to the door of the room in which Gualdi and Douglas were now just concluding their long conference. In about a couple of minutes Randolph glided back to the sitting-room, and resuming his seat at the table, said to Killigrew, "Hush! he is taking leave of Douglas! he is coming forth!"

Accordingly, Sir Lucio almost immediately made his appearance; and he at once addressed the envoys in the following manner:—

"Your Excellencies understand the conditions which I have laid down and which you will fail not to fulfil. In the first place, the Ladies Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming will resign their posts within the next twenty-four hours. In the second place, the release of the Countess of Lennox from the Tower of London must be effected with the least possible delay. When this shall be done, I pledge my word as a Knight and a gentleman to place in your hands the satchel-purse with every document which it contains."

Having thus spoken, Sir Lucio Gualdi inclined his plumed head with a cold and distant courtesy, and took his departure from the house occupied by the English envoys.

The moment the outer door of the suite of apartments closed behind him, Randolph laid his hand upon Killigrew's shoulder, saying with a tone and look of deep exultation, "That man is in our power after all!"

"What mean you?" asked Killigrew, with a quick start of surprise and joy.

"I mean that Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming shall not resign their posts," replied Randolph, "because Gualdi's doom is now sealed—and he shall die!"

"Explain yourself," said Killigrew.

"Just now," proceeded Randolph, "when I stole to the door of the inner room to listen, I heard Gualdi saying that he bade Douglas farewell until they should meet

amongst the Pentland Hills, and that he should set out from Holyrood precisely at five o'clock in the morning, attended only by his page !"

"Ah, by heaven ! this is important !" cried Killigrew. "But think you that Douglas has been inveigling him into some snare ? It must be so !"

"Let us ascertain at once," said Randolph.

The two envoys accordingly proceeded to the apartment occupied by George Douglas ; and there they found the young man standing in an attitude of deep thought, with his arms folded across his chest.

"Why thus pensive, Master Douglas ?" asked Randolph : "what can have taken place betwixt Gualdi and thyself that hath left this influence upon thee ?"

"It is useless to ask me," replied Douglas ; "for the Knight has bound me to strictest silence. I was in his power : he might have handed me over as a traitor into the keeping of the Queen's guard ! I was forced to yield to the terms which he dictated, and to take the oath of secrecy in respect to their nature. Question me not, therefore, fair sirs ; but leave me, I entreat, that I may seek the rest whereof I stand in need—for I purpose to take my departure at an early hour in the morning."

"'Tis well," said Randolph, "We must respect the oath which you have taken ! Good night, Master Douglas—and a safe journey to you for the morrow."

The two envoys quitted the apartment ; and when they were once more alone together, Killigrew in-

quired of his comrade, "What do you understand from all this ?"

"Most probably," answered Randolph, "Gualdi has charged young Douglas with conciliatory messages to the Associate Lords ; for conciliation appears to be the Queen's policy in every respect. But no matter how the case may be, the necessity for our mode of dealing with the detested Gualdi remains the same. Let us lose no time in making the requisite arrangements—and we will breathe no syllable upon the subject to George Douglas !"

It is not necessary for us to enter into minute details respecting those arrangements. But we may now proceed to state that precisely at five o'clock in the morning, Sir Lucio Gualdi arrived in his armour, and mounted upon his gallant steed, rode forth from the precincts of Holyrood-Palace. He was attended by Oliver Dunsyre, also well armed and well mounted ; and we may here observe that the gallant youth now suffered no inconvenience from the wound which he had received on the preceding evening, and which fortunately proved to be a slight one.

The way of the Knight and the page lay along a road which passed through meadows and amidst orchards in the immediate vicinage of a house belonging to the Provost of Edinburgh, and bearing the name of the Kirk o'Field. It was a sort of country residence for the worthy magistrate, just as any citizen now-a-days may possess his suburban villa for occasional retirement. All that part of Edinburgh which is now covered with buildings, was then a portion of the open country, and the road

which wound through it was lonesome.

Sir Lucio Gualdi rode in advance according to custom, his page following at an interval of some twenty or thirty yards. At a very short distance past the boundary of the gardens belonging to the Kirk o'Field, a thicket bordered each side of the road, thus forming two walls of verdure, between which our travellers pursued their way at a walking pace, for the ground was uneven and moreover Gualdi chose not to distress the horses at the outset of the journey. But scarcely had the Knight and his page entered upon the pathway intersecting the thicket, when there was a sudden rush of armed men from several points at the same time ; so that while Gualdi in front found himself abruptly assailed by four desperadoes, a similar number had likewise sprung forth upon the young page.

Like a flash of lightning did Gualdi's sword sweep from its sheath ; and by suddenly wheeling his horse half-round, he saved the noble animal from the point of a lance which one of the ruffians was about to drive into its body. The next instant the individual himself fell dead with his skull cloven open in twain by our hero's trusty brand. Then scarcely had the eye time to wink, ere the Knight's weapon cut down another of his assailants : but at the same instant he was attacked by a third on the other side, while the fourth was preparing to deal him a cowardly blow from behind.

Ill would it then have fared with the gallant Gualdi—for the ruffian who assailed him in the rear was on the very point of availing himself of the moment when the

Knight's horse was almost down upon his haunches, to plunge his sword into our hero's back between the joints of his corslet. Ill, therefore, it would have fared, we say, with Gualdi if at the moment assistance had not come. But vision-like this succour did arrive, in female shape and in loveliest form !—a bright dagger gleamed in the rays of the morning sun, and the next instant it was buried in the breast of the ruffian who was about to deal the coward blow at our hero from behind.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HERMIT'S CAVE.

SIR LUCIO GUALDI heard the yell of anguish which burst forth from the frustrated assassin in his rear, and a glance made the Knight aware of the fearful peril which he had just escaped. But what amazement mingled with the thankful joy which seized upon his heart—what a thrill passed through his entire frame—when that same reverted look showed him that the fair auxiliary who seemed to have just dropped from the clouds, or to have sprung up from the bosom of the earth, so sudden was her appearance *there*,—was none other than Mary Douglas !

If anything were required to lend additional nerve to the arm of the Italian Knight, it would have been such an incident as this : his fourth assailant, however, tarried not to receive condign chastisement from his blade ; but the fellow flung down his sword and buckler,

plunged into the thicket, and disappeared from the view.

"Dearest Mary, how much I owe thee ! how fondly I love thee !" exclaimed Sir Lucio, as he wheeled round his steed ; and flinging a look of tenderest admiration upon the maiden, he spurred his animal past her in order to fly to the assistance of his page.

A somewhat sharp turning in the road prevented those upon the theatre of one conflict from observing what passed upon the other. But in a moment Gualdi was borne by his gallant steed round the projecting part of the thicket which barred the view ; and the next instant showed him the condition of affairs in this quarter. Four ruffians had attacked Oliver Dunsyre ; one of them lay dead upon the ground—a ghastly evidence of the prowess with which the brave youth had defended himself ; but it was scarcely to be supposed that he could have long maintained the contest against such fearful odds. Nor was it so :—for just as Gualdi appeared on the scene, Oliver was being torn down from his horse, and one of the desperadoes was exclaiming in a tone of savage menace, "Be still and be silent—or you shall die !"

Scarcely were the words spoken, when Gualdi, galloping up to the spot, struck down the ruffian who uttered them—while Oliver Dunsyre, by a sudden and vigorous effort, released himself from the grasp of the other two who had laid hands upon him. One of them was instantaneously disarmed by Gualdi who sprang from his steed for the purpose ; while the other turned to flee. But the young page snatching up his own weapon, which had

been torn from his hold, precipitated himself after the fugitive, and catching him at the moment he was about to plunge into the thicket, compelled him to fling down his arms and surrender at discretion.

Of the four ruffians who assailed Oliver Dunsyre, one had been killed by him—another had been smitten down by Gualdi, severely wounded, but not slain—the remaining two were prisoners.

"Dare to move one step unless by my command," said our hero to these two captives, "and that moment shall be your last ! Oliver, my gallant minion, keep thou guard over them with thy drawn sword."

While thus speaking, Gualdi tossed into the thicket the defensive weapons belonging to the dead, the wounded, and the captive desperadoes, in order that there might be no chance of the prisoners being enabled to resume the conflict on a sudden and seek to avenge their defeat. By the Knight's order the two captives marched in front under Oliver's care, to the spot where the other conflict had taken place ; and great was the surprise of the young page when he beheld a female form bending over one of the ruffians in the middle of the road—and greater still the youth's amazement on recognising Mary Douglas.

The dagger wielded by the heroic maiden had penetrated the upper part of the bravo's chest, just below the throat. She had now drawn forth the weapon—she had flung it aside as a discarded and loathed object which she could never touch again since it had drunk human blood ; and she was now applying her kerchief to the wound to staunch the crim-

son tide that flowed from it, and save if possible the wretch's life. And now let those who rail against the contradictory traits in woman's character, mark how amiable these inconsistencies may sometimes prove, and in what admirable lights they may on occasion show themselves ! For Mary Douglas at first blessed heaven to think that for some time past she had been accustomed to wear a pliant dagger concealed in her corset ; and then she flung it aside in sickening disgust and horror. As a heroine she had wielded it—but as a woman she had afterwards recoiled from its contact. She would have dealt death ruthlessly to save her lover : but when the blow was stricken, she grew dizzy at the blood-mist which seemed to rise upon her vision. And last, and strangest, and most admirable trait of all !—she now forgot that the wounded wretch was a foe and an assassin, but she yearned to save his life as a fellow-creature ; and thought at the instant of peril she would have annihilated an entire army, if she had possessed the power, in order to save her lover's life, yet now she shuddered at the bare thought that even one man's death should lie upon her conscience !

Sir Lucio Gualdi, on beholding how she was engaged in staunching the blood of the wounded bravo, instantaneously comprehended her feeling and her motives, and she suddenly seemed to become dearer if possible to his soul. Hastening forward he said, " Leave this task to me !—and the look which he flung upon her explained all he thought and felt at the moment.

He was soon enabled to pronounce a tolerably positive opinion

to the effect that the man's wound was not mortal, while he could almost promise that it was not particularly dangerous. It was the custom in those times for persons who stood the chance of encountering perilous adventures, to carry with them a small supply of salve, lint and plaster ; and Gualdi's disposition, though fearless and daring to a degree, was not after all quite so reckless as to neglect such a prudential precaution. The articles alluded to were in the keeping of his page : they were quickly produced ; and with a by no means unskilled hand did Gualdi dress the wound which the dagger of Mary Douglas had inflicted. We ought now to observe that of the four desperadoes who had assailed Gualdi, two were killed by his own hand at the outset—the third was the wounded one just spoken of—and the fourth had fled.

" Oliver," said Gualdi, " when I bethink me of the best mode of procedure, 'twere well if you were to move a little aside with your two prisoners, and question them closely in respect to the meaning of this attack, and by whom they were employed ; for 'tis plain, methinks, that they are not common brigands. Meanwhile I will question this fellow here : we will afterwards compare notes and see whether the truth shall have been told us. If they all agree in their tale, we will perchance show mercy unto them ; but if by contradiction they prove that they are dealing falsely with us, then we will hand them over to the authorities."

Oliver Dunsyre accordingly led his prisoners some little way aside ; and then Sir Lucio Gualdi, after exchanging another fond look with

Mary Douglas, addressed himself to the wounded man, whom he had raised to a sitting posture against a tree by the side of the road.

"You have heard the speech which I just addressed unto my page," said the Knight, "and you know, therefore, what you may expect at my hands according as you speak truthfully, or falsely."

"I will tell your worship the truth, as I have a son to be saved," answered the wounded bravo. "Proceed, Sir Knight."

"What is your name?" demanded our hero; "and what are you?"

"Uven is my name; and as to what I am, the question is best answered by boldly avowing that my sword is at the service of whomsoever it may suit to hire it. The same may be said for that matter of all the rest who were my comrades just now."

"Bravoes by profession! cut-throats by trade!" ejaculated Gualdi aside to Mary Douglas. "And now, fellow," he continued, again addressing himself to the wounded man, "tell me at once by whom you were employed to waylay and attack myself and my page?"

"I I do not know, may it please your worship," was the response.

"Ah! beware how you trifle with me!" exclaimed Gualdi. "Remember that though the dagger has failed to take your life, yet that the hangman possesses a cord——"

"I know it," interrupted the bravo, with a rough air of sincerity. "Listen. It was past midnight, when two persons muffled in cloaks and wearing Masks came to the tavern which my comrades and I frequent——"

"Name the place," said Gualdi.

"The Gaberlunzie's Rest, behind the Grey Friars in the Grass-market. 'Tis a place, Sir Knight, where gold may purchase the aid of desperate men for any enterprise."

"'Twould seem so. Proceed. Two personages came thither, you say, after midnight, cloaked and masked?" "Even so, good sir," replied the bravo. Their object was soon made known: their gold was liberally bestowed—their promises were still more prodigal—and we undertook all the wished."

"What were their instructions?" demanded Gualdi.

"To slay you, Sir Knight, without hesitation or mercy; but to spare your page's life, if possible—for they said 'twere useless to spill blood unnecessarily. You see, Sir Knight, those gentles had certain scruples of their own about taking the life of a youngster, who, it may be opined, stood not in their way as you do."

"Ah! they were gentles, were they?" said Gualdi. "To be sure one might judge so from the fact of their having gold to lavish on such an enterprise. And peradventure you judged also by their appearance; for though cloaked and masked you might yet form some sort of estimate on the point?"

"And this I did, Sir Knight," answered the bravo. "They were gentles, no doubt—but beyond this I know naught of them; for full cautious was their conduct. Not a glimpse did I obtain of their faces; while they spoke in tones evidently disguised, and with accents that might have been Southron, or French, or Italian—like your worship's, for instance—craving your good pardon for the remark."

"But their stature?" said Gualdi.

"this at least you must have observed?"

"Oh, truly! both were tall and upright. One would suppose their presence to be commanding.

"You ere now spoke of the promises whereof they were as prodigal as of their gold," said Sir Lucio. "Explain yourself."

"'Tis quickly done, fair sir," rejoined the bravo. "Our instructions from our two unknown employers were to the effect that we were to rifle your person, and whatsoever we might find in the shape of documents or papers, tablets or pocket-satchel——"

"Ah!" ejaculated Mary Douglas, struck by the mention of an article which at once served to conjure up a suspicion in her mind.

"Proceed, fellow," said Gualdi to the bravo. "What were you to do with those articles in the event of your murderous enterprise having experienced success?"

"We were to keep them carefully at the tavern, where they would be sent for after dusk this evening and another goodly bag of gold," added the bravo, "was promised as the additional recompense of our services."

The Knight addressed further questions to the wounded man: but he succeeded in eliciting no supplementary particulars of any consequence. He now summoned Dunsyre back to the spot, and found that the page had received from the two prisoners a statement most accurately corroborating every detail obtained from the lips of the wounded bravo.

"I will not waste words," said Gualdi, "in addressing any remonstrances, to such wretches as ye are,

against the modes of life which ye have adopted. Rest assured that if ye persevere in the same course, ye will sooner or later be doomed to confront the hangman, though I may spare ye now! And this I do according to promise. Ye who survive, dispose of your dead and your wounded as best ye may. Oliver, lead on the horses slowly. In a few minutes I shall overtake you."

The page proceeded to obey his master's order; and he led the two steeds along the road. Gualdi and Mary Douglas turned away from the loathsome company of the bravo and walked on for some twenty or thirty yards until another curve in the path placed them out of view of the ruffians as well as of the spot where the maiden had appeared with such vision-like suddenness to save the life of her lover. And now mutual explanations were given on several points, though in a brief and hurried manner; for Gualdi was in haste to resume his journey, while Mary Douglas had her own reasons for wishing to return speedily to the place whence she came.

"You know," she said, commencing with an explanation on her own side, "it was about eleven o'clock last night when you left the Queen's boudoir in order to visit the English envoys at her Grace's request. No sooner had you taken your departure, when the Queen with that vivacity which characterises so many of her actions, resolved at once to give orders to the Provost of Edinburgh to make proclamation early this day, at the Market Cross and other public places, for the gathering of recruits under the royal banner. A

messenger was at once sent to summon the Provost to Holyrood ; but in a few minutes he returned with the intelligence that the worshipful Provost was not then at his usual residence, but was entertaining a few members of his family at his villa, the Kirk o' Field. The Queen, elate at the possession of the requisite funds for the equipment of an army, was determined not to delay her proceedings for a single moment unnecessarily. Besides, she thought it would be a favourable opportunity to flatter the Provost with a royal visit, and thus confirm him in his loyal attachment to her cause. All impetuosity and gaiety under the altered circumstances of her position, the Queen laughed like a joyous, happy, innocent child, at the idea of the surprise which she was about to cause at the Kirk o'Field. The King agreed to accompany her. So their Majesties, attended by Lord and Lady Erskine, Mary Seaton and myself, and the page Master Drayton, set out to walk——"

"To walk?" ejaculated Sir Lucio, in surprise.

"Yes," responded Mary Douglas: "this was a part of the Queen's wild freak. Besides, the distance is barely half a mile, even taking into account the somewhat circuitous windings which the path pursues. We were all muffled in cloaks and masks——"

"Like the two worthies who employed the bravoës," interjected Gualdi with a smile. "But proceed, dear Mary. The night was beautiful, I remember—and the breeze was fraught with delicious fragrance from the gardens of Holyrood."

"Yes—and likewise from the

gardens of the Kirk o'Field, which we soon reached," pursued the maiden. "You may imagine better than I can describe, Lucio, the mingled amazement and joy with which the Provost welcomed the Queen, and the pride which he felt when she graciously expressed her intention of appearing amongst his guests. But first of all her highness explained the cause of the late visit ; and the Provost promised that the drums should beat for recruits at the Market Cross this morning in Edinburgh. Then an hour was passed gaily with the Provost's guests—somewhat *too* gaily for a certain personage," added Mary Douglas, with a smile, the arch significancy of which almost immediately changed into an expression of pity and disgust. "In a word, the King drank too deeply of the Provost's malmsey and canaries, and it was considered expedient to provide him with a bed beneath that roof. So the Queen likewise determined to remain ; and we who had accompanied her thither, tarried also. Her Grace charged me to send the first thing this morning to the palace for such toilet-necessaries and changes of raiment as were requisite. For this reason was it that I rose betimes—before five o'clock indeed—to despatch Drayton to Holyrood, so that the Queen might be enabled to return thither by seven o'clock, before the folks of Edinburgh should be well astir. Having sent off Master Drayton, I rambled in the gardens, and presently sat down in a summer-house situated on a little eminence commanding a view of the road. Scarcely had I entered the arm our, when I beheld a small party of

armed men arrive along the road on foot ; and they stood deliberating for a minute or two—then they separated into two parties—and all of a sudden they disappeared from my view. The thought that flashed to my mind was that some new danger menaced the Queen ; and I fancied that the villains had hidden themselves in the thicket to discuss their plans ; for I said to myself, ‘ They must know that her Grace will not pass down the road, but in the contrary direction ; and therefore they cannot be entertaining a hope to intercept her at that point.’ I therefore stole down from the summer-house to a gate opening into a field behind the nearest thicket ;—towards the thicket itself I crept, in order to listen, if possible, to the conversation of the ambushed villains, and ascertain what their projects might be. But scarcely had I begun to enter the verge of the thicket, when the sounds of horses’ hoofs reached my ears ; and there was a rush from the thicket and an attack upon the foremost horseman ! To my amazement it was *you* ? One bound through the thicket, and—and, Lucio, you know the rest !”

“ I know that I owe you my life, dearest Mary !” answered the young Knight ; “ and rather would I be indebted for it to you than to any other living soul ! There is something ineffably sweet in the idea that you were the angel sent to save me under such circumstances !”

“ But what is to be done to the unprincipled assassins who set the coarser and more ignoble bravoës to work ?” inquired Mary Douglas ; “ for I saw that you were at no difficulty to conjecture who they were ; and perhaps I also ventured

on a surmise when the wounded man spoke of the pocket-satchel or purse.”

“ If the Queen of Scotland can bring herself, dear Mary, for political reasons, so to treat the English envoys as to avoid an open rupture with them, even though they be plotting against her crown, surely it becomes my duty to treat them with equal forbearance, even though they be plotting against my life ?”

“ True, Lucio—true,” said Mary Douglas. “ And then, too,” she added, solemnly, “ retribution is certain sooner or later to overtake all evil-doers. But wherefore this dark treachery on their part ? why their hatred against you ?”

“ It is no enigma for me, dear Mary,” responded Gualdi. “ I have made a terrible discovery !—a discovery which it was my intention to explain to you amongst other things last evening, when, as you remember, the clarion sounded at eight o’clock, and you were compelled to leave me.”

“ But this discovery, Lucio—what mean you ?” asked Mary Douglas in suspense.

“ I told you this much,” proceeded Gualdi.—“ that the satchel-purse contained several documents written in the same cipher and having the same key. It is evidently a favourite one with Randolph ;—and no wonder ! for ‘tis the most difficult to be deciphered that I ever knew. However, amongst those documents was one which your half-brother, the Earl of Murray, wrote from Stirling to Sir Thomas Randolph, a week or two after the memorable ride from Perth to Callander House. And that letter contained allusions—nay,

even specified facts, which I must confess did not altogether very much startle me when they thus came to my knowledge, but which will alike distress as well as astonish you ! For I myself have for some weeks known that two of the Queen's maidens had the English envoys as their lovers ; and moreover, if any additional proof had been wanting, the looks of mingled guilt and terror which they exchanged last night in the boudoir—"

"Heavens, Lucio ! what do I hear ? what am I to understand ?" asked Mary Douglas.

"That Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming are traitresses to their Queen !—that their hearts have become corrupted by the atrocious wiles of Randolph and Killigrew ! You may well regard me with consternation, dear Mary :—it is nothing but the truth that I tell you. I have not the documents about my person : they are in my apartment at Holyrood : but I can quote from memory the exact words which the Earl of Murray uses in his letter written to Randolph from Stirling. He says,

"I am here, watching the progress of events. Thanks for your letter. Your correspondence is always as agreeable in its chatty details as it is important in other points of view. It was a pleasant conceit of yours to visit Perth in a monk's disguise ; and well thought of was that disguise inasmuch as it afforded thee the cowl to pull over thy countenance at need. But perhaps still more pleasant was it for your Excellency and Killigrew to have made such way with the hearts of the two volatile Maries, so that they now afford you information in all things ! But that

you should have taught them to write in this cipher which we use is perhaps a still finer stroke of policy ; and it is amusing to think of Mary Beaton flinging forth from her window, after midnight, to yourself in the gardens below, that billet which you so kindly expedited unto me by a trusty messenger to Lochleven !"

"Oh, heavens !" here broke in Mary Douglas, clasping her hands ; "that there should be such treachery in the world !"

"Alas that it should be so !" said Gualdi. "But still I am inclined to think that when Mary Beaton penned those lines—*The hour is altered. The Queen will leave at five in the morning. There will be no additional escort !*—when she penned those lines, I say which Randolph sent off forthwith to Lochleven, she did not suspect at the time the full extent of the horrible dangers which she was preparing for her royal mistress. Indeed, believing that the heads are more weak than the hearts are downright wicked in respect to Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming, I thought of saving them from the fearful scandal and shame of an exposure ; and I last night stipulated with Randolph and Killigrew that they should use their influence with the two Maries in a most peremptory manner, so as to effect their retirement from the Court as if it were through voluntary resignation. And now perhaps you understand, dear Mary, the motive of this ambush and attack on the part of hired bravoës ?"

"I am indeed infinitely distressed," said the young maiden, the tears trickling down her cheeks, "at all you have told me."

"But now, my well-beloved,"

exclaimed Gualdi, "I have other and different tidings for thee. Yes, you will be glad to learn that I have seen your brother George: he has abjured the cause of the conspirators—he bade me assure you solemnly that you shall never henceforth have any reason to sorrow or chafe at his conduct!"

"This is indeed joyous intelligence!" exclaimed Mary, her beautiful countenance brightening up. "But where did you see my brother? how——"

"No matter for the present, dear Mary. It is to meet him that I am riding forth thus early. Believe me, we are excellent friends; and a little expedition which I have now in hand may probably prove useful——"

"Another expedition, Lucio?" said the maiden, surveying her lover with a smile upon her lip and admiration in her gaze. "But I will not question thee! And, heavens! how the time has been passing! The Queen will miss me from her toilet!"

"And I shall lose a good hour by this morning's adventure!" interjected Gualdi. "Yet, oh! the unlooked for happiness of having met thee!"

The lovers embraced and separated—Mary Douglas hastily retracing her way through the thicket and the field back to the gate leading into the grounds of the Provost's villa; and Gualdi speeding onward to overtake Oliver Dunsyre, who had charge of the horses about a hundred yards ahead.

Our hero and the youth pursued their journey at a rapid pace! but they were nearly an hour behind the appointed time when they

reached St. Paul's Cross, which was a rude structure of stone, about ten feet in height, and standing on the bank of a streamlet of crystal clearness. Gualdi felt convinced that George Douglas would wait for him at the trysting-place. Nor was he mistaken: for as he and Oliver drew near the Cross, they beheld three horses banqueting upon the sweet grass on the margin of the stream, in the care of two men appalled in menial garbs, while a third individual was reclining at a little distance along the bank. This was George Douglas; and he rose to greet Gualdi, as the latter, followed by his page, drew nigh.

Our hero dismounted, in order to afford his steed a brief interval of rest; and as he gave the reins to his page, he hastily whispered, "It is needless to gossip with those servitors touching the adventure which detained us at the outset of our journey."

Oliver bowed in acknowledgment of the command; and Gualdi walked a little way along the bank, in company with Douglas, who said, "I feel assured, Sir Knight, that some incident of more or less importance must have delayed your coming; for of all men whom I know, you are the least likely to have been cheated by slumber into an hour's extra indulgence on the pillow."

Gualdi looked hard at George Douglas for a few moments; but the expression of the young gentleman's countenance continued so unchanged, so frank, and so free from confusion, that all doubt upon a certain point—if indeed there were any in our hero's mind—was at once banished.

"You only do me justice, my friend," he said, "when you speak of me as no idler in bed when circumstances require that I should be astir and in the saddle. But it is a matter of thankfulness for me, Master Douglas, that I am here to meet you at all, after having run the gauntlet, together with my gallant page, of a posse of bravoës ambushed to assail us."

"Ah!" ejaculated Douglas. "And where may this have been?"

"Just outside the city wall, where the road winds round the Provost's suburban house."

"I know it," said Douglas: "tis called the Kirk o'Field. But were they brigands or bravoës who thus attacked you, Sir Knight? for there is a difference between the two descriptions of rascals."

"I comprehend full well the difference," replied our hero; "and therefore with all certainty may I assure you that these villains were bravoës—hireling assassins who do murder's work for a price. The very name itself is taken from mine own native language—"

"And these miscreants were hired, Sir Knight," ejaculated Douglas, "to level their weapons at you?"

"It is only too true, my friend," rejoined Gualdi; "and those who hired them, were none other than the English envoys, Randolph and Killigrew."

A burning glow suffused the countenance of George Douglas, as he exclaimed, "Now, by heaven, those villains might have drawn down suspicion upon an innocent head! Indeed you *must* have fancied, Sir Knight, that I had told them of your intended journey—of the hour at which you were to start

—and even of the very route which you were to take! But I swear to you, as I have a soul to be saved, that not even inadvertently did I betray these circumstances!"

"I believe you, my friend—I believe you!" ejaculated Gualdi. "In a word, I had never any very serious misgiving on this point. I knew that if by any chance you had suffered them to obtain a clue to my intended movements, it was with no idea of furthering their treacherous plot against my life. But we ought to have reflected last night that two such restless, astute, and prying spirits would have been somewhat moved by curiosity at the length of our interview, and that much was to be gleaned by eavesdroppings and listenings."

"The unprincipled villains!" ejaculated Douglas. "By all the saints, they shall experience condign punishment!—they shall be exposed!—the law itself shall be invoked against them!"

"Patience, my friend—patience!" said Gualdi; "and curb this excitement!—for it best suits my aims and views that the adventure should be as little spoken of as possible. I have even taken the precaution to bid my page keep silent concerning it in the presence of your followers yonder; and, as you may have perceived, it was not until we were beyond earshot of those men, that I began speaking to you on the subject. If the law were invoked against the envoys, the Queen of England would seize upon it as a pretext for declaring war against Scotland: and therefore it shall not be on my account that the two powers become embroiled."

"Enough, Sir Knight!" observed Douglas. "If it suit your good

pleasure to throw a veil over the atrocious wickedness of the English envoys, it is not for me to bruit abroad the secret. But I am now right thankful that my communications with them have been cut short, and that by the course I have proposed to adopt I shall never again become a secret intermediary of treasons wherein such exquisitely refined villains are concerned."

"And may I ask," said Gualdi, "what course it is that you thus purpose to adopt?—or rather I should inquire how you propose to shape your conduct in extricating yourself from the meshes of conspiracy in which you have become involved? Suppose, for instance, that my interview with the Earl of Murray should fail in its object, and that he should persist in remaining in arms against the Queen,—suppose, I say, that despite the interception of the golden subsidy from England, your infatuated half-brother should persevere in his treasonable enterprise——"

"I have pledged myself to you, Sir Knight," interrupted George Douglas, "that I would abandon the cause of the conspirators; and I will not only keep my word, but I will likewise accomplish my purpose in a way that shall save myself from the suspicion of basely deserting that cause at the instant when it seemed most desperate. How my course is to be thus shaped, you will know presently, Sir Knight. In the meantime let me demand of you once again, and for the last time, whether you are resolved upon seeking this interview with the Earl of Murray?"

"It is my fixed purpose," answered our hero.

"You rely upon his chivalry—

his honour—his faith," proceeded Douglas; "you will appeal to him on behalf of the ring which he gave thee as a pledge of his gratitude; you will regard it as the guarantee of your safety while venturing into the lion's den! And moreover you hope that you will be enabled to induce him to listen to your reasoning or your overtures, and to lay down his arms! Well, Sir Knight, it were a pity, in good sooth, if your sublime confidence in human nature should be destined to experience a rude shock!—a pity also were it if you were to fail in this mission of peace which you have voluntarily imposed upon yourself! But let me tell you, my friend, you know not James Earl of Murray as I know him; and therefore, after mature reflection, I have determined upon the adoption of a plan which will serve thee ten thousand times better as a talisman of safety than the ring which you look upon as the pledge of Murray's gratitude."

"My thanks are due to you, Master Douglas," said Gualdi, "for so much friendly consideration on your part——"

"No thanks, Sir Knight," interrupted the young gentleman. "It is because of that very friendship, which, as you yourself have said, ought now to exist between us, that I feel myself bound to serve thee in all things."

"And this plan of thine?" asked Gualdi.

"That also shall presently be explained," rejoined Douglas. "But now, if you think your steeds have obtained sufficient rest, it were as well that we should resume our journey."

Sir Lucio Gualdi assented: the party mounted their horses—and

the route was continued amidst the Pentland Hills. George Douglas acting as the guide. He and Gualdi rode together in advance ; while Oliver Dunsyre and the other two menials followed at a respectful distance. Let us here remark that the two menials just mentioned, were a couple of stalwart grooms, who had accompanied George Douglas to Edinburgh for the purpose of assisting in conveying away the expected treasure from England ; but they had not been told beforehand for what purpose they had been sent with their young master to the capital, and they were not therefore surprised at returning empty-handed.

The journey was continued for some hours : the line of the Pentland Hills was traversed, and those of Lanarkshire were entered upon. The Clyde was crossed at a ferry a little below the town of Lanark itself ; and in due course the mountainous boundary of Ayrshire was approached. Our travellers were now forty miles from Edinburgh : but we need hardly observe that there had been occasional halts for rest and refreshment.

It was about noon when the party entered a dark wood on the eastern slope of the London Hills. There was a beaten path, which wound its way in a meandering or serpentine form, on account of local circumstances, amidst the umbrageous masses of verdure. A long interval of silence had occurred on the part of Gualdi and Douglas ; but it was now somewhat abruptly broken by the latter, who said, "We are now approaching, Sir Knight, a place well known in this region as the Hermit's Cave."

"Does any particular legend

attach itself thereunto ?" asked Gualdi.

"Yes—but of that no matter. Suffice it for me to explain," continued Douglas, "that the holy anchorite who hollowed and shaped it, had a strange notion of what he doubtless deemed a suitable habitation. Conceive a hole only just large enough for a person to creep through, on the sloping side of an isolated mass of rock—this aperture leading to a descent of a dozen steps, at the bottom of which is the inner entrance to the cave itself. This cavern is ten feet high, and about a dozen square : but what is most remarkable is that at the back of it there is a sort of sloping ledge, hollowed like a gutter, down which trickles a pellucid spring of icy coldness."

"According to your description of the cavern," said Gualdi, "it must be quite dark."

"Not so," responded Douglas ; "for I forgot to mention that there are two loopholes cut through the solid wall of rock, at the back of the cavern, over the spring of crystal water. Now let me add, Sir Knight, that not only on account of the quality of the water itself, will my two men presently expect to taste it, but the superstition of the district holds it to be unfortunate to pass near the Hermit's Cave without drinking of the spring which flows out of a rock and back into its granite bosom again in so mystic a manner."

"Then by all means let your followers tarry for a few minutes and slake their thirst in the cavern," said Gualdi.

"So be it," observed Douglas. "And I also shall enter the cave."

Gualdi glanced at his young

companion ; for it struck him that there was something significant in his speech, as if it had a hidden meaning which was yet to be explained.

"Do you not understand?" asked George Douglas, abruptly.

"No," replied Sir Lucio.

"Then I will explain myself :"—and Douglas accordingly unfolded his mind to our hero, who listened with increasing surprise and interest to all the details of the project which his companion had formed in reference to the Hermit's Cave. What this project was the narrative itself will immediately show.

In a few minutes a mass of rock, standing alone and rising like a pyramid amidst the trees, was reached. Douglas pointed out the hole to Gualdi, saying, "That is the entrance into the cavern."

Almost immediately afterwards, Oliver Dunsyre and the two grooms rode up to the spot ; and the latter also pointed out the entrance to the cave to the view of the young page, to whom they had been giving some account of the deceased anchorite's habitation, thought with a very different purpose from that which their young master entertained when describing it to Gualdi.

"I suppose, my men," said George Douglas, springing from his steed, "that ye would fain slake your thirst at the holy spring in the cavern ? I also were loth to pass the place by without tasting of the precious waters. And you, Sir Lucio ?"

"I have no inclination that way," responded the Knight ; "and I am free to confess that I have no superstition with regard to luck or ill-luck in connexion with the matter.

Oliver may follow you into the cavern if he list. I will remain and take care of the horses."

"Good !" said George Douglas. "Follow me, my men."

Having thus spoken, the young gentleman passed through the aperture ; and as he again called to his grooms to follow, his voice sounded strange and sepulchral from the depth into which he was descending. Those men entered one after the other ; and then Gualdi hastily whispered to his page a few words explanatory of what was now about to take place. Oliver listened in surprise, but with a rapidly increasing interest : and with a look he showed that he fully comprehended the part which he had to perform.

"Now, Master Douglas, a word with you !" exclaimed Gualdi, stepping close up to the mouth of the descent of steps. "Circumstances compel me to adopt a particular course towards yourself and your followers. In a word, ye are my prisoners !"

"Prisoners ?" echoed Douglas, from the cavern below : and at the same time ejaculations of surprise and rage burst from the lips of the two grooms.

"Aye, prisoners !" exclaimed Gualdi. "The term is intelligible enough. While I am absent, Oliver will mount guard here with his drawn sword ; and the first who ventures to ascend the steps sufficiently high for his head to reach this opening, may count upon a cleft skull !"

"Treachery ! perdition ! vengeance !" ejaculated the two grooms from the subterranean hollow.

"Peace, my men ! peace !" said George Douglas. "We are in this

Knight's power. Let us ascertain what his object may be." Then from the bottom of the steps, he raised his voice, crying, "What would you, Sir Lucio Gualdi?"

"Look you, fair young sir," replied our hero, assuming a stern and dictatorial tone. "My object, as you are aware, in trusting myself to your company, was to obtain an interview with the Earl of Murray. You have already told me that his lordship is somewhere in this neighbourhood:—you will now explain to me the precise spot where I may fall in with him. Then, for as much as I am somewhat dubious of the good feeling of the Earl towards me, prudence dictates that I hold you here as a hostage for my safe return.—Leave the horses for a few minutes, Oliver; and bestir thee to collect all the dry wood that lies scattered about, and pile it up in the close vicinage of this aperture. Ah! and thou may'st cut some pine branches with your knife: they would flame furiously!—Now, Master Douglas," proceeded Gualdi, again addressing himself to the young gentleman, "if yon sun which is at present vertical in the heavens, shall reach the western horizon without beholding me return in safety to this spot, my faithful page will know that the death of his master is to be avenged; and without pity or remorse will he set fire to this pile which he is already gathering!"

Sounds of rage and horror went forth from the lips of the two grooms; and to the ears of Gualdi and the page they sounded like the savage howlings of wild beasts in the cavern below.

"Peace, I say—peace!" ejaculated George Douglas, in an im-

patient tone. "Let us hear all that this cold-blooded Knight may have to say."

"Therefore," proceeded Gualdi, "you will write a few lines, Master Douglas, upon a leaf of your tablets to the effect that you are held as a hostage in some secure place—which you will name not—and that your life depends upon my safe return ere the hour which I have specified. If you have not your tablets with you, I will lend you a leaf from mine; and if there be not enough light down below from the loophole, you may advance a sufficient height up the steps in order to pencil the lines."

"I have my own tablets," answered Douglas; "and there is light enough here. I am bound to yield to your dictates. On the same leaf I will trace a plan of the path which you must pursue, in order to reach Dunsley Tower—where you will find the Earl of Murray. The distance is four miles hence."

There was an interval of silence for a few minutes—at the expiration of which George Douglas exclaimed, "The writing is finished. Receive it, Sir Knight—and tell me whether this billet to the Earl of Murray be worded in the terms that suit thy purpose?"

"Give it to me," said Gualdi:—then, after having taken it from the young gentleman, who ascended the steps sufficiently high to enable him to pass his hand through the aperture, our hero ran his eyes over its contents. "This will answer my views, Master Douglas," he added, when he had perused the document. "Everything now depends upon the alternatives whether your half-brother's affection

for you or hatred for me be the greater."

Having thus spoken, Gualdi secured about his person the leaf torn from the tablets, and mounted his horse.

"Now, Oliver," he exclaimed, in a loud tone, "take thy station, brave youth, with thy drawn sword—and do thy duty as thou dost understand it!"

The Knight rode away; and the page posted himself at the mouth of the narrow flight leading down into the subterranean, from the depths of which the sounds of rage on the part of the grooms again came up, like the low and half-subdued growlings of wild beasts.

CHAPTER XVI.

DUNSLEY TOWER.

SIR LUCIO GUALDI pursued his way through the forest, thinking of all the adventures which had so recently befallen him, and not the least of the incident which had just occurred in reference to the Hermit's Cavern. Ever inseparable from his thoughts—no matter how varied or chequered they might be, however bright or however clouded—was the image of Mary Douglas, whom from every possible circumstance daily became dearer and dearer to his soul. The chivalrous heart of our hero glowed with pride—a noble and a lofty pride—at the reflection that whatsoever deeds of knightly enterprise he might perform, were accomplished in the service of the most beauteous of queens, and were certain to win the approving smiles of the most lovely

of maidens. Thus Mary Stuart and Mary Douglas held joint sway over Sir Lucio Gualdi, the former possessing the devotion of his chivalrous spirit, the latter owning all the love of his manly heart.

The distance from the Hermit's Cave to Dunsley Tower was a little more than four miles, and the road lay through a district that was mountainous and woody. About three-fourths of the way had been accomplished, when Gualdi reached an opening in the forest which afforded him a view of the grey summit of a massive edifice rising above the trees at a short distance ahead. This he knew by the itinerary sketched for him by George Douglas was the destination that he sought; and he was just wondering within himself what would be the result of his interview with the Earl of Murray, when two horsemen in complete armour suddenly emerged from amidst the trees on the opposite side of the narrow open space which our hero was traversing. The first glance showed him that they were personages of distinction, by the richness of their armour and the ornaments on the trappings of their steeds: but they were both in the act of closing the vizors of their helmets at the very instant when they thus suddenly burst upon Gualdi's view, and he had therefore no opportunity of catching even the most transient glimpse of their features? Both were tall—but one was slender of shape, while the other was far more stoutly built and more portly of form.

Gualdi's vizor was raised: he had no need to conceal his face, inasmuch as it was his purpose to announce himself by name the

moment he might reach the tower. Saluting the two approaching horsemen in the usual style of knightly courtesy, Sir Lucio was about to address them in polite terms also, when, as if they were both speaking in the same breath, they exclaimed, "By heaven! 'tis the false Italian caitiff!"

This recognition was evidently simultaneous on their part—and so was the impulse by which they both in a moment acted. Their swords flashed from their sheaths—they put spurs to their steeds—and as the high-mettled animals bounded forward, they cried out for Gualdi to surrender, again applying to him the term "false caitiff!"

"Caitiff in the teeth of both of ye!" exclaimed Gualdi; and in the twinkling of an eye his vizor was closed, and his hand grasped that terrible weapon which was never drawn in vain.

Another instant and the attack commenced: but to do the two horsemen fitting justice, it must be observed that in this first onslaught they strove only to disarm and capture Gualdi, and not to take his life. Thus, while the portly horsemen sought to strike his sword from his hand, the slender cavalier pressed his steed close alongside of our hero's and clutched him by the scarf which he wore over his corselet. Then was it that the Italian Knight displayed all the marvellous rapidity of action, the strength of arm, and the mighty prowess which so eminently characterized him. So far from his sword being stricken from his hand, it beat back the ponderous weapon against which it clashed; and then it struck so tremendous a blow upon the helmet of the portly warrior, that though it penetrated

not the well-proved steel, it nevertheless made its wearer reel in his saddle. At the same instant our hero's left hand struck, with all the force of the clenched gauntlet, so vigorous a buffet against the aventail or vizor of the slender horseman, that it dashed him from his steed, and he fell heavily with his clashing armour upon the ground. With the rapidity and vividness of lightning did Gualdi's blade sweep through the air: it rained blow after blow upon the burly warrior—now clanging upon his headpiece—now sounding upon his shoulder—now dashing against the bracers which defended his arms—but without being able to penetrate that panoply of steel richly inlaid with gold. As for the portly toeman himself, he found not the slightest chance of touching our hero: for from the very first instant that he was thrown upon the defensive, he was compelled to continue in the performance of that part until the combat was suddenly brought to a close. This was accomplished by means of a blow dealt by Gualdi with such terrific effect on one side of his foeman's head, that it cut against the pivot of the vizor, literally tore away the vizor itself, and at the same time hurled the warrior from his saddle. In the twinkling of an eye Sir Lucio sprang from his own steed, strode across the foe whom he had just vanquished, and tearing away the vizor completely from his face, instantaneously recognised the Duke of Chatelherault.

"Surrender, my lord! surrender!" said Gualdi, grasping his sword by the middle of the blade so as to be able to use it as if it were a dagger, and holding the point but a few

inches above the face of the prostrate Duke.

"I surrender, Sir Knight," responded Chatelherault. "You have vanquished me, and you have a right to dictate!"

Gualdi, glancing for a moment, towards the other prostrate warrior, and seeing that he lay perfectly motionless, continued to address himself to the Duke, above whose countenance he still continued to hold his weapon in a way that menaced death at any instant.

"Your Grace will swear," pursued Gualdi, "by all you believe and fear—by all your hopes of salvation, as well as by your solemn word as a nobleman and honour as a Knight—that you will implicitly obey whatsoever terms I may dictate as a condition of sparing your life?"

"I have already said that it is for you to dictate, Sir Knight," responded the Duke of Chatelherault, "and I swear!"

"Tis well," said Gualdi: and instantaneously quitting the threatening posture which he had maintained while kneeling upon the Duke, he laid down his sword for a moment, snatched up the weapon which had fallen from that noble man's hand, broke it across his knee, and dropped the two pieces upon the ground. Then catching up the sword which had fallen from the grasp of the other discomfited warrior, he broke that weapon likewise in halves, tossing the fragments down upon the others.

"You have not specified the terms you think fit to dictate, Sir Knight," said the Duke of Chatelherault.

"One moment!" exclaimed Gualdi. "Let us look after your comrade. Ah! by St. Antonio, the

Earl of Argyll!" he cried, as he stooped down and opened the vizor of his slender-shaped foeman's helmet. "I fear that he is past recovery! But if he be indeed gone to his final account, he hath only himself to blame! No—he lives! Oh, for some water!"

Our hero had taken off the Earl of Argyll's helmet, and the long brown hair of the handsome nobleman flowed upon the grass which now pillowed his head. His eyes were closed, but his lips were quivering, so that it was evident the spark of life was not extinct. One side of his face was much bruised, with the terrific force of the blow with which Gualdi's clenched and gauntleted hand had stricken him for his steed and prostrated him senseless upon the sword.

"There is a stream just within yon trees," said the Duke of Chatelherault, who was now taking off his own helmet, which was battered and dented, besides having the vizor destroyed.

Gualdi, snatching up his sword from the ground, returned it to its sheath, and hastened with Argyll's helmet in his hand to the spot indicated by Chatelherault. There he filled the helmet with water; and quickly retracing his steps, sprinkled some of the crystal element upon the face of the still unconscious Earl. In a very few moments this nobleman gave additional evidence of returning life: he opened his fine blue eyes—first he gazed vacantly up at the countenance which bent over him—but his looks soon grew steady and lucid—and as the blood mounted suddenly to his cheeks, it became evident that all that had transpired now flashed back to his memory.

"My lord," said Gualdi, "the Duke of Chatelherault has been compelled to swear by all his hopes and fears touching an hereafter, and by the salvation of his immortal soul, as well as by the honour of true chivalry, that he will faithfully adhere unto such conditions as I may presently think fit to dictate. This oath from your lips also must I exact—or else thou may'st prepare to die, Lord Earl of Argyll!"

Sir Lucio this time drew forth a dagger which he wore in his belt, and held it menacingly above the nobleman. A glance on Argyll's part showed him that his friend Chatelherault was standing near with a look of sad discomfiture and wounded pride.

"But what," said Argyll to our hero, "if you dictate terms which would leave death a desirable alternative?"

"As a true Knight myself," answered our hero. "I am incapable of dictating aught which may be incompatible with the laws of chivalry and honour."

"Then I yield: I accept the terms," responded Argyll. "I will take the oath."

"Repeat it," said Gualdi: and when his mandate was complied with, he added, "Your life is saved, my lord. Sit up, and raise this cooling draught to your lips, which seem fevered with thirst."

The Earl drank copiously of the water, which had been fetched in his own helmet; and Gualdi reflected for upwards of a minute ere he again addressed the two vanquished noblemen. Then, taking his stand in such a manner that the fragments of their broken swords lay at his feet, he spoke in the following strain:—

"The terms which I deem it my duty to dictate are to the effect that your lordships will renounce your treasonable hostility against your Sovereign, and return unto the observance of due loyalty and allegiance towards her Highness. By the oaths which ye have taken—by the rights which as your victor I exercise over you—and by these emblems of your present powerlessness which lie at my feet, I call upon you to swear that ye both alike yield unto my stipulations."

"We swear," said the Duke and the Earl, as if both were speaking in the same breath; and both likewise answered in a manner that can only be described as a species of sullen hauteur.

"My Lord Duke," demanded Gualdi, "how many troops have followed you into Ayrshire?"

"I came with but an escort of some fifty men," replied Chatelherault.

"Then I presume," continued Gualdi, "that on the intended march towards Edinburgh, you would have gathered your own powers when passing in the vicinage of your estates at Kinniel?"

"Such was my intention," answered the Duke.

"And you, my Lord Earl of Argyll," proceeded Gualdi, "with how many followers came you into Ayrshire?"

"With some two score," was this nobleman's reply.

"And in your lordship's case also I may surmise," added our hero, "that on the Earl of Murray's hoped-for march upon Edinburgh, it was proposed that you should go forward in advance to gather your jackmen and troopers at Castle

Campbell, and thence come down to effect a junction with the main body of the Queen's enemies?"

"The same mode of procedure was to have ruled me, Sir Knight," answered the Earl, "as in the case of the Duke of Chatelherault."

"Where may your followers at this moment be, my Lord Duke?"

"At Mauchline," responded Chatelherault, "with the exception of a couple of page who rode after me this morning to yon tower."

"What distance is Mauchline hence? and in which direction does it lie?" asked Sir Lucio.

"The distance is some five miles—and the direction is thitherward," said the Duke, pointing with his arms towards a particular quarter.

Similar questions were put to the Earl of Argyll; and from the replies which this nobleman gave, it appeared that his followers were at Kingswell, about six miles from Dunsley Tower, and that he had also ridden over in the morning with two attendants. On learning the direction in which Kingswell was situate, Gualdi was reassured on a particular point—as indeed he had just before been in respect to Mauchline: namely, that neither the Duke's nor the Earl's followers need pass near the Hermit's Cave when quitting those places for the purpose of returning to their respective homes. For our readers may easily comprehend how it by no means suited the Knight's purpose that any persons connected with the Earl of Murray should find Oliver Dunsyre mounting guard over George Douglas and his grooms in a place of prisonage.

"I now require the attention of your lordships," resumed Gualdi, "while I dictate the mode in which

your renunciation of the cause of treason is to be carried out. You, my Lord Duke of Chatelherault, will mount your steed and ride away direct for Mauchline. No matter for the two pages whom you will thus leave at the tower! On reaching Mauchline, your Grace will at once despatch a messenger to the Earl of Murray, with a letter announcing your withdrawal from the treasonable confederation. Allege what reason or furnish what excuse you may think fit: I shall in nowise contradict you. But see that within two hours from the present time that letter be delivered to the Earl of Murray at Dunsley Tower! You, my Lord Earl of Argyll," continued Gualdi, turning towards the younger nobleman, "will mount and proceed with similar expedition to Kingswell to write a similar letter for a similar purpose, and to be delivered likewise within two hours from the present moment. Then, so soon afterwards as may be convenient—in the evening of this day, at all events—your lordships will respectively set out from Mauchline and Kingswell, with your followers, that ye may return unto your own homes and throw yourselves on the Queen's mercy."

"And you, Sir Knight," asked Chatelherault, "guarantee that the royal pardon shall be awarded unto us?"

"I guarantee nothing," responded Gualdi, haughtily. "It is not my place to make compromises, but to dictate terms in respect to your lordships. 'Tis for you to appeal for forgiveness to that Sovereign whom ye have outraged with your flagitious rebellion! If your guilty consciences tell you that ye

deserve not mercy, then must ye obey the instincts of safety, according as they suggest themselves. All this is no concern of mine."

Gualdi paused for a few moments: the nobles exchanged disappointed and disconcerted looks, and the Knight resumed his address in the following terms:—

"You perceive, my lords, that by the mode which I have enjoined you to adopt in signifying to the Earl of Murray your withdrawal from the rebellion, I leave you to devise whatsoever excuse ye may think fit: I do not bid your lordships write and confess that your decision is compulsory and not voluntary, and that it is the result of a defeat which you have sustained. I am not desirous of wounding your honour in its most susceptible points: I leave it in your own keeping. It will be *your* fault if it should transpire that in company ye attacked Sir Lucio Gualdi, and that alone, he worsted ye. But now understand me well! If on parting from me anon, ye fail to perform my bidding if in any respect ye violate your oaths and prove yourselves foresworn and perjured—then will I unhesitatingly proclaim to the world how with a dastard spirit ye both made on-slaught at the same time upon me, and how I made ye both bite the dust! And as a proof of my avowal I shall display these trophies of my victory: for doubtless many an eye will readily recognise the begemmed hilt of the sword worn by the Duke of Chatelherault, as well as the gilt handle of the weapon belonging to the Lord Earl of Argyll!"

While thus speaking, Sir Lucio stooped down, picked up the frag-

ments of the two swords, and proceeded in a calm and leisurely manner to deposit them in a little leathern case or portmanteau attached to the back part of his saddle, and which contained a few toilet-necessaries. The Duke and the Earl fully appreciated the fact that their honour was veritably in the Knight's keeping, and that it would be little to their credit if the tale were published abroad, how they, being two in number, had set at the same time upon *one* foe—while their pride recoiled from the idea of its becoming known how completely they were vanquished. They therefore laid aside their habitual hauteur while they thanked Sir Lucio Gualdi for his generous and delicate conduct towards them, promising to fulfil all his injunctions, and entreating him to remember that their honour was in his keeping.

"And rest assured, my lords, it shall prove to be in safe guardianship," returned Gualdi, "provided I receive proof of your good faith in observing the terms which I have dictated. I am about to visit Dunsley Tower:—I shall at the outset say naught of my encounter with your lordships; but if at the expiration of two hours the letters do not arrive, I shall no longer consider myself bound to keep the seal of silence upon my lips, but shall proclaim all that has occurred on this spot. And now, my lords, I pray ye mount and take your departure."

The Duke and the Earl hastened to obey this mandate; and as they moved away from the spot, they saluted Sir Lucio Gualdi with the air of men who were compelled to descend from the pinnacle of their

own pride and bear themselves with courtesy towards one who had their honour so entirely in his power. As their roads lay in contrary directions, they almost immediately separated, striking into two distinct paths leading through the forest, the one towards Mauchline, the other towards Kingswell. As for Sir Lucio Gualdi—having refreshed himself with a draught of the crystal streamlet which rippled nigh, he mounted his steed and pursued his way along a third path in the forest towards Dunsley Tower.

This fortalice, which stood upon an eminence overlooking a deep ravine on three of its sides, was a place of considerable strength. It consisted of a donjon, or main tower, standing in the midst of a quadrangle formed by thick battlemented walls on the three sides above referred to, and by a line of buildings on the fourth side, this being the one by which it was approached from the forest on whose verge it stood. It was the property of Sir Angus Dunsley, an elderly Knight, who was a staunch member of the Protestant Faith and a zealous partisan of the Earl of Murray. He was a widower, and had three sons, who were of a warlike disposition, as hot-headed as their father in their devotion to any cause which they might think fit to espouse. We should add that though these young men, together with their sire, had embraced the tenets of the Reformed Church, yet that their conversion had not been wrought by the mere power of moral suasion, but had been produced by the influences of political partisanship; so that in changing their faith, they had neither divested their souls of pré-existing supersti-

tions, nor their manners of a semi-barbarous rudeness.

There was one circumstance connected with the old feudal tower, of which the Dunsleys were especially proud, and which showed how little the mere profession of the Reformed Faith had done towards the enlightenment of their minds. Beneath the chapel of Dunsley Tower was a vaulted apartment, the walls and floors and ceilings of which were of such solid masonry that it almost seemed as if it were hollowed out of a rock. The air was only admitted by a small trap in the huge door, and by a grating in the centre of the arched ceiling—which grating therefore was set in the paved floor or the chapel overhead. Of fresh air there was consequently little enough, while of daylight there was still less—for it was only the feeblest glimmering which could penetrate into this tomb-like chamber from the grating overhead or the small *quichet* in the door. The traditions of the House of Dunsley declared that one of the earliest scions of the race, after having fought gloriously in the Third Crusade, had returned to his native Scotland to pass the remainder of his days in a species of self-martyrdom; and that after having perpetrated a marvellous catalogue of the most atrocious crimes in the far-off regions of Palestine, he had finally attained to the highest possible degree of earthly sanctity, so that his glories as a warrior were absorbed in his virtues as an anchorite. To that sepulchral chamber of massive masonry had he confined himself for a series of years, until conceiving that a still deeper degree of self-mortification

might prove wholesome for the welfare of his soul, he decided upon abandoning his ancestral tower and retiring into the sombre solitudes of the adjacent forest. Then he fashioned for himself the singular habitation which we have already described, and which was known as the Hermit's Cave.

Such was the legend pertaining unto the career of one of the earliest members of the Dunsley race, and which had invested the Stone Chamber, as it was called, with an air of the utmost sanctity in the estimation of all succeeding scions of the same family. The present Knight, Sir Angus Dunsley, and his three sons, were as deeply imbued with this reverential feeling as any of their predecessors; and even if their minds could have been uplifted from a superstitious adoration of their famous ancestor, their pride would have prevented them from making any admission, would derogate from his repute as a saint.

Having given these explanations, we may resume the thread of our narrative. There was to be a grand council of war at Dunsley Tower: the chiefs of the rebels were expected to attend—matters of the utmost consequence were to be discussed—and a solemn compact was to be signed, to the effect that no individual should desert the cause, make terms, or accept pardon for himself, without the consent of his comrades. To this bond the names of all the Associate Lords and Chiefs of the party were to be affixed; while the terms thereof were to be ratified by the most sacred oaths. The ceremony was therefore to be a solemn one; and what place could be more

appropriate for its performance than the Stone Chamber? Such was the suggestion made by Sir Angus Dunsley, and readily caught at by the Earl of Murray. This wily nobleman, though himself little inclined to superstitious belief, was nevertheless aware of the influence which it wielded over the minds of others; and he knew that those oaths would prove the most binding which were taken under circumstances the best calculated to impress them with awe and terror upon the soul. Embarked as he was upon the stormy waters of rebellion and with the responsibilities and risks of a leader, he naturally sought to attach his fellow-conspirators as closely to himself as possible, and to guard against that falling-away, in case of a reverse, which would leave him in a condition of the most fatal isolation.

The chiefs of the rebellion began to assemble in the Stone Chamber, which was lighted by three or four pinetorches thrust in rings attached to the wall. A table, with some chairs and settees, or rude stools, had been conveyed thither for the accommodation of the company; and out of respect for the Earl of Murray, some drapery had been hung over the seat which he was to occupy at the head of the council-board. Thus, while the sun was shining in all its unclouded brilliancy upon the scene outside, within that tomb-like apartment men were meeting by the lurid glare of torches, the light of which seemed to give a more sinister aspect to their own countenances as well as to the very cause itself in which they were embarked.

It was about two o'clock on this

memorable day that the chiefs of the rebels, to the number of about eighteen or twenty, were assembled in the Stone Chamber at Dunsley Tower. There were the Earls of Murray, Rothes, and Glencairn; the Lords of Boyd and Ochiltree; James Hamilton of Bothwellhaugh, Kirkaldy of Grange, and others. The Earl of Murray presided at the council. On his right sat Sir Angus Dunsley, one hand resting upon his basket-hilted claymore, the other upon the steel morion which he had taken from his head and now held upon his knee. His three sons, with their matted hair and fierce moustaches, bore a strong resemblance to the sire, and by their impetuous ejaculations and savage gestures during the proceedings, they showed their readiness and their capacity for any deeds, no matter how desperate.

The Earl of Murray, on taking his seat, bowed courteously to his assembled friends, and said, "My lords and gallant chiefs, we will at once proceed to the discussion of the important matters which we have in hand."

"Our number is not complete, my lord," said Kirkaldy of Grange, looking around upon the various countenances on which the lurid glare of the torches played with such strange and sinister effects. "I behold not our noble friends the Duke of Chatelherault and the Earl of Argyll."

"I expect their return momentarily," responded the Earl of Murray. "The truth is, we are looking every instant for the arrival of my trusty and well-beloved half-brother George Douglas, who was despatched to Edinburgh for a

special purpose, which is already known to some of you, and which is now to be explained unto the rest. In a word, the hopes which were held out to us in a certain high quarter, have been most handsomely and nobly fulfilled: the Queen of England is our friend—and as a proof of her sympathy, Her Majesty hath been graciously pleased to forward into Scotland for our use a subsidy of five thousand pounds."

Ejaculations of surprise and joy burst forth from the lips of those to whom the intelligence was new; and the Earl of Murray watched with inward delight the effect produced by the announcement.

"Naturally anxious upon the point to which I have just alluded," continued Mary, "our noble friends the Duke of Chatelherault and the Earl of Argyll have ridden forth in the hope of meeting with George Douglas, that they may assure themselves of the safe coming of the promised treasure. For, inasmuch as the arrival of the said treasure in Edinburgh was to be timed to the nicest calculation of day and hour—aye, even to the very minute—we are enabled to judge that our trusty George Douglas must now be close at hand on his return from the capital with the gold in his keeping. Thus was it, my friends, that I fixed the present hour for our meeting in solemn council, in order that with your own eyes you might behold the glittering evidences of Queen Elizabeth's sympathy, and our means of prosecuting our most sacred enterprise."

"And therefore," said one of the assembled chiefs, "we may incontinently expect Master

George Douglas, if no accident should have befallen him?"

"Which heaven forbend!" exclaimed the Earl of Murray. "But it is scarcely possible there can be a misadventure in a case where the plans have been deftly settled by the Queen of England's wisdom, and where we may rely upon the true heart and strong arm of George Douglas. In respect to Chatelherault and Argyll, we need not delay our proceedings for their return; inasmuch as they are already acquainted with the preliminaries I am about to submit to your attention. Here," continued the Earl, drawing forth a document ready drawn up, "is a compact devised in the spirit with which ye are already acquainted, and to be ratified by an oath worded in the most solemn strain. The document has met the approval of Chatelherault and Argyll. They will subscribe to it on their return, and they will unite with yourselves in taking the oath of friendship, association, and brotherhood."

"And let me remind you, my friends," said the Knight of Dunsley, rising from his seat, "that if this be no trivial purpose which we have in view, neither is this an ordinary place wherein we meet. The spirit of the sainted dead is amongst us. Though invisible to our eyes, it is here to look upon what we are doing, and listen to the terms in which we are about to swear. Let not the oath therefore be lightly taken! It will turn into a curse for him that shall dare to violate it. Ruin will overtake him:—misery shall fall upon his head and upon the heads of his children: disease shall cleave unto him—and death in one of its most

horrible forms shall bear him away from the scene of his perjury! I speak with the inspiration of one who hath an indissoluble traditional sense of the solemn sanctity of this place, and the awful responsibilities which belong, either for good or for evil, unto whatsoever may be done within its walls."

The old Knight sat down, leaving through the medium of his earnest eloquence a deep impression on the minds of nearly all, if not *all*, present; for even Murray himself, though so little prone to superstition, experienced a certain sensation of awe at which he was in his own mind surprised. There was a pause for upwards of a minute: and then the Earl, again rising from his chair, began to read the document with a solemn voice and deliberate manner. It was couched in the most stringent terms: it bound all who subscribed to it to consider the welfare of the "Association" (for so the rebel chiefs termed themselves) as paramount. It was to overrule all personal interests or private considerations. The ties of kinship, family, and friendship were to be regarded as nothing in comparison with that welfare. Whosoever should be caught in open hostility or in secret opposition to the cause of the Associates, was to suffer the consequences. No sympathy could be allowed to plead for him—no mercy could be permitted to save him. When the chiefs met in council, the vote of the majority was to be decisive. In a word, every precaution was taken to render this league of rebel chiefs as terrible and as formidable for defensive as for offensive purposes; and the oath which ratified the compact, was

drawn up in terms as fearful as even the Knight of Dunsley himself would pronounce compatible with the supernatural solemnity which, like a haunting ghost, belonged to the chamber where the conclave met.

That oath was taken. The Earl of Murray read it a second time, by the light of the torches which some of the chiefs took down from the walls and held so as to throw the lurid light upon the paper. And when each individual pronounced the formula, "*I swear!*" the ferocious sons of Sir Angus Dunsley drew forth the claymores flashing from their sheaths, laid them upon the table crosswise, and called upon the others present to follow their example by kissing the symbol.

The Earl of Murray appended the names of those present; and the process of swearing upon the naked swords was gone through in compliance with the semi-barbaric notions of the fierce sons of the House of Dunsley. Scarcely was the ceremony completed when a page entered the Stone Chamber, after having duly knocked at the door; and addressing himself to the Earl of Murray, he said, "May it please you, Lord Earl, a Knight demands immediate speech with your lordship."

"Ah! who may he be?" demanded Murray. "Gave he no name?"

"Yes, my lord," was the page's answer: "the warder bade me announce him as Sir Lucio Gualdi."

The mention of the name at once created an immense sensation amongst the rebel chiefs; and Angus, the eldest son of the old Knight of Dunsley, exclaimed with

savage exultation, "By heaven, this is a good beginning! Our bitterest enemy in our power!"

"He shall die! he shall die!" shouted the other two sons of the old Knight.

"Patience, my friends," said the Earl of Murray: "patience! This is no doubt important! We must learn why he comes, and from whom."

"What matters it?" vociferated the sons of the Knight of Dunsley. "He is our enemy! he shall die! The very oath which we have taken demands his death!"

"True," said Murray, but with a strange kind of misgiving and repugnance in his mind, for which he could not altogether account. "Minion," he added, turning to the page, "go and escort Sir Lucio Gualdi hither."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE STONE CHAMBER.

BEFORE introducing Sir Lucio Gualdi into the presence of the rebels, it were perhaps as well that we should specifically mention the little incidents attending his arrival at Dunsley Tower, after having parted from the Duke of Chatelherault and the Earl of Argyll in the adjacent wood.

Our hero rode up to the entrance of the ancient feudal structure; and from the open portals two or three armed men at once came out. The Knight demanded if the Earl of Murray was at the tower—and if so, whether he could obtain an immediate interview with his lordship?

"And who may you be, fair sir?"

inquired one of the armed warders, without giving a direct response to our hero's question.

"You may announce me as Sir Lucio Gualdi—an Italian Knight—not altogether unknown to the Earl of Murray."

Our hero perceived that the mention of his name produced an immediate impression upon those whose ears it had reached. And no wonder!—for the part which he had played on the memorable day of the Queen's ride from Perth to Callander House was only too well known amongst all the partisans of Murray, whose treacherous design on the occasion it had so utterly defeated. But now, as he sat upon his steed at the gate of Dunsley Tower, Gualdi appeared not to notice the threatening looks which were suddenly bent upon him when he announced his name: he maintained his wonted air of careless confidence and well-bred ease, which seemed to imply the absence of all suspicion of enmity or sense of danger. But his eye was not the less keenly awake to note every circumstance that it might be expedient to observe; while his hand was ready to grasp the hilt of his trusty sword at the slightest evidence of open hostility.

"Be pleased to enter the court-yard, Sir Knight," said the chief warder, "while your message is conveyed to my master, Sir Angus."

"It is not with your master that I have any concern," replied Sir Lucio, as he rode beneath the gate-way and dismounted from his horse. "You are careful not to admit that the Earl of Murray is here; but for a certainty do I know that he is within these walls. However,

perform your duty after your own fashion, so long as there be no needless delay in carrying my message."

The warder appeared little pleased at thus being lectured by the Italian Knight: but without giving any reply, he summoned a page and whispered a few words in his ear. The youth hurried across court-yard, and disappeared through the low deep-mouthed entrance of the donjon-tower.

"You will perhaps be sufficiently courteous towards a way-worn traveller," said Gualdi, again addressing the warder, "as to suffer him to stable his steed which has borne him upwards of forty miles since daybreak. Or if you object to bestir yourself in showing me this much of hospitality, you may at least permit me to act as mine own groom for the nonce."

The churlishness of the warder was somewhat subdued by an appeal made with so much frankness and urbanity: but still it was not with an entirely good grace, much less with positive alacrity, that he could fulfil the Knight's request. In a sullen manner he summoned a groom, whom he ordered to take charge of the wearied animal.

"With your permission," said Sir Lucio, "I will just see that my good steed is stabled carefully."

"Be pleased to tarry here, Sir Knight," said the warder, in a peremptory tone,—“at least until the return of the page whom I have sent with your message."

"Good," said our hero, with an air of the calmest indifference. "I merely thought that inasmuch as my steed hath his vices, and is apt to bite the stranger hand that would seek to remove his bridle, and kick at the unknown groom who may

approach to unhouse him of his caparisons,—methought, I say, that in order to prevent any accident of the sort, I would e'en accompany the serving-man to the stable ; for no lamb is gentler than this steed when his master stands nigh !”

“ In that case,” said the warder, gruffly, “ you had better do as you suggest, Sir Knight :”—and then as he turned with sullen looks towards his guardroom at the gate, he adding in a muttering tone, “ This precious Italian has already done sufficient harm to our cause, without bringing his horses to our stables to kick out our grooms' brains.”

Sir Lucio accompanied the hostler, who had charge of his steed, to the stables, which were close at hand, forming part of the line of buildings in the midst of which the entrance-gateway of the fortalice was situated. It was a very long, low-pitched, ill-ventilated place ; and a glance showed our hero that there were about thirty horses lodged there at the moment, while their caparisons and housings, suspended to the walls, were all of good materials, and some of them were richly ornamented.

“ Ah !” thought Sir Lucio to himself, “ there is evidently a gathering of leaders and chiefs, with their squires and pages, at Dunsley Tower this day.”

The stalls—if they may be so denominated—were not separated by wooden partitions, but were simply defined by massive pieces of timber suspended a couple of feet from the floor by means of ropes fastened to the ceiling. Of these divisions there happened to be a couple that were empty, and one was close to the door. Into

the letter the groom led Gualdi's horse, saying the while.

“ If the brute is vicious, Sir Knight, you would do well to keep near, while I do what may be required of me ; for I relish not the risk of either bite or kick.”

“ You are only wise in your caution, good fellow,” answered Gualdi. “ So suffer me to remove the bridle while you procure the provender ; and have a care that in my absence you venture not to approach the animal's heels.”

Our hero fastened his steed by a halter to the rack, and hung up the bridle against the wall : but he removed not the saddle nor the portnanteau attached to it. The groom quickly made his appearance with some hay and water, and when our hero had carefully provided for his steed's wants, he returned into the courtyard. There he found the page waiting for him ; and the youth said with a serious air, but in a manner sufficiently respectful, “ Be pleased to follow me, Sir Knight, to the Stone Chamber, where the Lord Earl of Murray will receive you.”

The page, having heard the terrific menaces which had burst forth from the lips of the Knight of Dunsley's sons, looked upon Gualdi as a doomed man, and could not, therefore, find it in his heart to treat him with the sullenness, bordering upon total disrespect, which had been shown towards him at the gate.

“ And pray, young sir,” asked Gualdi, in a good-tempered careless manner, as he accompanied the page along a narrow passage in the Donjon, “ what may be the meaning of the name of the Stone

Chamber, in a place where all the apartments are no doubt built of the same solid material, and therefore all equally meriting the same appellation?"

"If you were not an utter stranger in these parts, Sir Knight," replied the youth, "you would not need to inquire touching and concerning the Stone Chamber of Dunsley Tower. There is a solemn sanctity pertaining thereunto; for many and many a long year ago—after the Third Crusade, more than three centuries and a half back—the redoubtable Sir Hugo Dunsley secluded himself in a vault beneath the chapel; and that vault has since been known by the name of the Stone Chamber. The great warrior became an anchorite or recluse——"

"And doubtless died there," observed Gualdi, "in the full odour of sanctity?"

"Not so, Sir Knight," rejoined the page. "He deemed it too luxurious to dwell in a chamber built of masonry, even though it were a vault little better than a charnelhouse, and he, therefore, moved to a cavern in the neighbouring forest. There he breathed his last:—but 'tis said, Sir Knight," added the page, in a subdued tone, "that the ghost of the departed saint still haunts at times the Stone Chamber, where the living man himself passed so many of his latter years on earth."

"Ah!" said Gualdi: "he removed to a cavern in the forest?"

"Yes, Sir Knight: and the place itself still exists—for the inhabitants of the district take care that no weeds shall grow over the entrance to the grotto, and no accident choke up the source of the spring which

flows in its bosom. 'Tis called the Hermit's Cave."

"Indeed," said Gualdi. "I should very much like to see it."

The young page could scarcely help throwing a look of commiseration upon the Knight, whom he began to regard as a very agreeable personage, although their conversation had been so short.

"Alas!" thought the youth within himself, "you little suspect that your hours—your very minutes are numbered, and that never shall you go forth from within these sombre walls!"

Two or three tortuous passages had in the meanwhile been threaded, and a descent of stone steps was now reached. The corridors themselves were only dimly lighted by loopholes: but a blazing pine-torch redeemed the mouth of the downward flight of steps from the utter darkness which would otherwise have enveloped it. At the bottom of the descent there was a massive door; and the beams of the torchlight above penetrated sufficiently far down to play upon the surface of this portal, showing that it was furnished with massive bolts, and that it had a little square trap, or *guichet*, which stood open. Lights were burning within; and a rapid glance flung through the trap, afforded Gualdi a glimpse of several sinister countenances upon which the glare of torches was playing with strange, fitful, oscillating effects. All was silent inside that chamber; for the rebel-chiefs were awaiting with suspense the appearance of Gualdi, that they might learn for what purpose he had sought Dunsley Tower, while many of them were thirsting for the blood of one who had done so

much to baffle their traitorous aims.

The young page opened the door, and announced, "Sir Lucio Gualdi."

The youth then retired : our hero crossed the threshold of the Stone Chamber, and the massive portal closed behind him. It was with a calm and dignified courtesy of bearing that he thus presented himself amongst the rebels ; and while some could not but admire that loftiness of mien mingled with so much graceful ease of manner, united to all the advantages of a strikingly handsome countenance, there were others who in the savage vindictiveness of their coarser minds looked upon him only with blood-thirsty hatred. As for the Earl of Murray, his inscrutable countenance afforded not the slightest index to the thoughts that were passing in his soul, and unfathomable was the steady expression of his grey eyes.

Notwithstanding the well-bred ease and chivalrous confidence which characterised Gualdi's bearing, he was as usual keenly alive to every circumstance that might at all regard him ; and thus he failed not to observe in a moment those threatening looks which seemed to glower upon him with murderous intent. But as if in reality he beheld nothing of the sort, he saluted the assembled chieftains with a becoming courtesy.

"Sir Lucio Gualdi," said the Earl of Murray, in a cold level tone, "you sought an interview with me?"

"I did, my lord," replied our hero ; "and I would fain that it should be a private one."

"This may not be !" vociferated the heir of Dunsley ; and his two

brothers immediately added, "We must have no secrets here !"

"None," said old Sir Angus, approvingly.

"Be it so," said Gualdi, with an air of the most perfect self-possession. "In that case I may speak openly and frankly in the presence of ye all. Therefore, my lords, brave knights, and gentlemen—for I presume that all these grades and ranks have due representation here—I call upon ye to lay down your arms and return to your allegiance to your lawful Sovereign the Queen of Scotland !"

"By our sainted ancestor !" ejaculated one of the fierce Dunsleys, "this insolence should be punished on the spot !"

"Patience, my good friend ! patience !" interposed the Earl of Murray ; "and let us ascertain upon what authority and with what pretence Sir Lucio Gualdi makes this haughty demand ?"

"Simply on the authority of one who chooses to serve the righteous cause of Mary Stuart," responded the Knight ; "and as for the pretence, there is naught but this good and excellent reason—that your case is already lost, so that I would fain save ye all from spilling human blood uselessly, and thereby placing yourselves utterly beyond the pale of the royal clemency."

"Our cause lost !" ejaculated Angus Dunsley, the old Knight's eldest son. "'Tis fine for you to tell us this, when within a very few minutes, if you are allowed to live long enough, you may behold with your own eyes the most convincing proofs that we possess those very means which are the guarantees of success !"

"And the want of which," added

another rebel-chief, "ensures the failure or downfall of the popish Queen's cause."

"Hush !" said the Earl of Murray : "ye are too communicative, my friends !"

"What matters it how we speak with frank openness to this insolent Knight ?" vociferated Angus Dunsley. "Is he not as good as dead ? what secret shall *he* ever carry forth with him from Dunsley Tower ? Let him know, therefore, to his confusion, that by this document which lies upon the table we are leagued in the bonds of indissoluble union——"

"Yes," cried the second of the Knight of Dunsley's sons ; "and that on those crossed swords have our oaths been taken that all the foes of our cause must die !"

"Aye," added the third ; "and that piles of the yellow gold shall in a few minutes be heaped upon this table !"

"And I tell you all, to *your* confusion," said Gualdi, "that the compact you have made is a vain one—that equally futile were your oaths—and that the gold ye speak of shall never reach your hands."

"Idle threats !" "Insolent menaces !" "Enough of this !" "Let him die !" and such like ejaculations burst forth from many mouths.

"I tell ye, false lords and traitorous gentles," exclaimed Gualdi, "that the sympathy of England's Queen shall avail ye not !—the succour she sent shall not reach you ! All is discovered—all is known !—and that English gold is now in the coffers of Scotland's Queen !"

"'Tis false ! it cannot be !" vociferated a few voices : but the majority of the rebel chiefs were

smitten with consternation at the announcement.

"Do you doubt me ?" continued Gualdi, his voice at once imposing silence upon the few vociferators, "Let me prove the truth of my words ! You, Lord Earl," addressing himself to Murray, "can say whether a certain Master Tamworth was to reach Edinburgh last night with the golden freightage, and whether your kinsman George Douglas was there to receive him ? Ah ! there is no longer a doubt ! I swear to you as a Christian Knight that the emissary Tamworth was intercepted—the gold was taken from him—and in the hour which is now passing recruits are flocking to the standard of your lawful Queen !"

"It is impossible silence to doubt the statement of Sir Lucio Gualdi," said the Earl of Murray, whose countenance has become deadly pale at the tidings in respect to the intercepted treasure.

Yells, cries, and howls of rage, fury, and vindictiveness, burst forth from the lips of many of the rebel chiefs ; and Angus Dunsley's voice, rising above the rest, exclaimed, "We are betrayed ! there has been treachery somewhere !"

"Where is George Douglas ?" cried others "why comes he not ?"

"If you mean that George Douglas was capable of betraying the trust reposed in him," said the Earl of Murray, "I would almost venture to stake my life upon his fidelity. Speak, Sir Lucio Gualdi ! Thou canst have no reason to be silent on this head !"

"I have none," answered our hero. "I came hither to speak with candour unto you. George

Douglas betrayed not his trust :— the object of his mission to Edinburgh was discovered by other means. Tamworth was intercepted—and he confessed everything. Believe me, my lords and gentles, the Queen is already raising with the English gold an army that shall sweep all before her !”

“ That is what we shall see !” exclaimed Angus Dunsley, with a fierce scorn. “ There is our compact, and we will remain true to it !”

“ True ! true !” echoed the speaker’s two brothers.

“ Well said, my sons !” cried old Sir Angus : “ ye have spoken right manfully ! It is not a reverse such as this which is to daunt and scare us !”

“ No, no !” cried other voices. “ The compact and the oath ! We are true—we are firm to our bond and to our vows !”

“ And, therefore,” exclaimed Angus Dunsley, “ this foreign Knight must die ! He who could tell us so much of the interception of the gold, may have had a hand in it !”

“ At all events,” cried the second brother, “ our revenge shall commence with him !”

“ Let him die !” cried the third. “ Lord Earl of Murray, pronounce the death-sentence, and we will lead him forth !”

“ One moment !” said Sir Lucio Gualdi, waving his arm with an air of so much lofty confidence and command that the fierce sons of the Knight of Dunsley fell back just at the instant that they were about to rush forward and seize upon him : “ one moment, I repeat ! You have asked me concerning George Douglas ? Learn then, that he is the hostage for my safety here !”

“ Ah !” ejaculated several voices ; and again was there a feeling of consternation and indecision amongst the rebel chiefs.

“ Be pleased, my lord, to read this document,” continued Gualdi, producing the leaf from the tablets of George Douglas.

Then our hero—who had remained standing all this time, although at the outset the Earl of Murray had pointed to a seat—now advanced to the head of the table and handed the leaf of the tablets to that nobleman. As Gualdi did so, his quick eye flung a rapid glance upon the paper containing the compact and the form of oath, as well as the list of names of the rebel chiefs who were then present, and who had given their adhesion to the bond, as described in the preceding chapter.

“ This is indeed the writing of my trusty and beloved kinsman George Douglas,” said the Earl of Murray, “ and the lines which are here pencilled confirm the statements made unto us by this Knight.”

“ Read ! read !” cried several voices.

“ Listen,” said the Earl of Murray ; and he read as follows from the leaf of the tablet :—“ *To the Earl of Murray, my beloved kinsman : Sir Lucio Gualdi will tell you that my mission to Edinburgh has proved useless. Heaven itself appears to be fighting on behalf of Mary Stuart ! As for my poor self, I am in close custody, detained as a guarantee and bondsman for the safety of Sir Lucio Gualdi. I may not mention where : but if the sun shall set this evening without witnessing that Knight’s return, you may pray for the soul of*

your loving kinsman who pens these lines.' "

A deep silence followed the reading of the billet : the several chiefs seemed to consult each other with their looks. Gualdi stood firm, erect, and confident near the head of the table.

" My lords and fair sirs," said the Earl of Murray, at length breaking that silence, " what is your decision ? The matter is in your hands."

No one immediately answered—until, after a pause of nearly a minute, the old Knight of Dunsley rose up slowly from his seat ; and pointing with an air of gravest solemnity to the document upon the table, he said, " There is our compact ! there are the terms of our bond ! According to the rules thereof, all our avowed enemies must die !"

" And he is one !" vociferated the old Knight's sons, pointing to our hero. " Let him die !"

" You forget, my friends," said the Earl of Murray, " that the life of George Douglas depends upon the safety of this self-constituted ambassador of peace."

" There is the compact !" said the old Knight of Dunsley, with implacable countenance, as he rested his forefinger upon the document. " Its conditions are like the laws of the Medes and Persians—unalterable ! Ye have sworn to obey them—and I warned ye of the solemn nature of the oath which ye were then preparing to take. Violate that oath by a tame and craven display of mercy where mercy should *not* be shown, and ye will draw down upon your heads the wrath of the avenging spirit which haunts this room ! And that oath—

to what effect was it ? Did it not bind us to reject all private considerations and personal interests in comparison with our duties, and to regard the very bonds of kinship as naught when the common welfare of our League demands the sacrifice ? Therefore, in the face of that solemn, that awful oath, pledged in such a place as this, and upon the swords which symbolise the cross, we dare not be swayed by any ulterior consideration. 'Tis true that if this Knight dies, George Douglas must die likewise—and with sorrow be it said that thus stands the case. But this Knight is our bitterest enemy—our most formidable foe ; and we must rejoice at his removal from our path, even though it be at the sacrifice of such a precious life as that of George Douglas !"

" But yet there is a clause in the compact," said the Earl of Murray, " that all moot points must be decided by the votes of the majority in council."

" Then so be it," said the Knight of Dunsley, with that grim calmness and cold ferocious confidence which showed that he had no fear as to the result of the test to which his bloodthirsty argument was about to be subjected. " But one word more ! Recollect that this Knight has been admitted amongst us—that he is now standing in our midst—that he has heard our secrets freely discussed—and that if we suffer him to go forth in freedom and safety from within the walls of Dunsley Tower, we send out into the world a witness who in the event of reverses on our side, may be enabled to prove against us much more than could otherwise be adduced in evidence to our

undoing ! In a word, let this man live and go free, and ye shut up the last loophole of escape that can possibly remain for any of us who might chance to fall captives into the hands of Mary Stuart or her partisans."

"But what," said the Earl of Murray, "if we were to bind Sir Lucio Gualdi by an oath, that on going hence he would maintain an inviolable secrecy in reference to everything he may have seen or heard within these walls !"

"There is better security in the green sod which seals the grave than in the oath which seals the lips :—"and it was with a grim doggedness that the old Knight of Dunsley thus spoke. "Besides, there is the compact !" he added ; "and remember, Lord Earl, that we all renewed our pledge just now to obey it, even after we heard the tidings that the English gold had been intercepted and would not reach us !"

"Then, as the compact stipulates for all disputed points to be decided by a vote !" said the Earl of Murray, "let us at once proceed to that ceremony."

"To the vote ! to the vote !" ejaculated the fierce scions of the race of Dunsley.

"That this Knight shall die—how say ye ?" asked Murray : and a glance the next moment showed him that the majority of hands were held up in favour of Gualdi's death.

"One word !—only one word !" said the Knight, who looked on with the most heroic calmness, and who now spoke with the unswerving and unblenching fortitude of those Roman heroes of old to whom

perchance his ancestry might be dated back.

"Let him speak," said the Knight of Dunsley, waving his hand to keep back his three impetuous sons and some others of the rebel chiefs, who were rushing forward to seize upon our hero. "Let him speak ! He is a doomed man :—he stands upon the very verge of the grave !"

"Yes," pursued Gualdi ; "and it is thus, while finding myself face to face with death, that I would proclaim unto you all a solemn warning—a warning to which ye may listen as if it proceeded from the very tomb itself ! It was here, in this very room, that a warrior from Palestine many and many a long year ago shut himself up for purposes of penance and self-mortification. 'Tis said that his spirit haunts the Stone Chamber still. It is, then, under such auspices that your compacts have been made and your oaths taken ! Yes ! ye would say that it is ! Then, if your cause be good, it will be initiated with auspicious omens : but if it be evil, the omens will be against ye ! And I declare that the latter is now the case ! Look how lurid burn the torches—how darksome grows the air !—and look, from behind yon draperies what ghost-like figure appears !"

Gualdi's voice had been rapidly rising in tone as well as quickening in utterance as he thus spoke : his words produced an electrical effect—a wild superstitious terror seized upon *most* of those present—while *all* simultaneously turned their looks in the direction of the draperies behind Murray's chair, as our hero raised his arm and pointed with outstretched finger as if to some

object that was inspiring even himself with terror.

What followed was then the work of a moment: it was done almost as quickly as the eye can wink. With his left hand Sir Lucio Gualdi snatched up from the table the compact of treason:—with his right hand he seized hold of one of the claymores which lay crossed there. He had not time to draw his own sword from its sheath, even if the other weapon had not been so ready to his hand. Then one bound towards the door!

"Treachery!" thundered the three sons of the Knight of Dunsley; and like as many wild beasts did they spring towards Gualdi.

But as there was only one bound to the door, so was there only one sweep of the terrible claymore to make good his escape. Desperately wounded—each in a moment with the blood gushing out from ghastly gapings in the flesh of arm or thigh—the three brothers fell back—Gualdi disappeared as if by magic—and the door closed behind him with a loud din. The old Knight of Dunsley, Glencairn, and Rothes threw themselves furiously against the massive portal: but at the same instant the shooting of the huge bolt into its socket on the outer side met their ears.

Our hero had accomplished this feat with that indescribable rapidity which was the sole condition of its success; and his admirable presence of mind in so skilfully working upon the superstitious terrors of the rebel chiefs was thus so far rewarded with complete success. But he had still to escape from the fortalice, and to meet any new casualty that

might arise. Leaving the claymore where he had dropped it when so hastily drawing the bolt upon the rebel chiefs in the Stone Chamber, and securing the document about his person, he lost not a moment in ascending the stone steps. Then he threaded the tortuous and dimly-lighted corridors of the Donjon, until he emerged into the broad daylight of the courtyard. There was the first person that he encountered was the young page who had conducted him in the first instance to the presence of the assembled conspirators. The youth was astonished—but mingling with the amazement which overspread his countenance, there was an expression of generous satisfaction and pleasure.

Gualdi at once comprehended what was passing in the stripling's mind: and with a good-tempered smile, he said, "You marvel, fair young sir, to see me come forth with a whole skin—or otherwise than in the custody of your grim old masters uncouth sons. But the Lords and Knights and other gentlemen gathered in the Stone Chamber, little suspected at the outset what might be the real nature of my mission. So the result is, as you see, that I am about to take my leave, unscathed and unharmed, of Dunsley Tower."

"And right glad I am, Sir Knight," said the youth, "that the issue of your visit to Dunsley Tower, so ominous at the outset, hath terminated so propitiously. Surely you will tarry to partake of refreshments?"

"Not so, kind page," answered Gualdi. "I have yet far to ride."

While they were thus conversing, the entrance to the stables was

reached ; and the first glance showed our hero that the saddle and its caparisons had not been removed from his steed's back. The next instant, as he stepped up to the animal, he saw that those caparisons had not been tampered with ; so that the fragments of the broken swords of Chatelherault and Argyll remained safe and undiscovered in little portmanteau. It was for the assurance of this object, by preventing the eyes of curiosity from prying into the secrets of the portmanteau, that he had invented the little fiction of the viciousness of his horse ; for in reality the animal was totally devoid of the faults he had ascribed to it.

The bridle was quickly put on—a liberal fee was slipped into the hand of the groom—a kind farewell was bestowed upon the young page—and Sir Lucio Gualdi rode forth from Dunsley Tower, without the slightest interruption on the part of the morose warders, who nevertheless wondered how so determined a foe to the cause of the Associate Lords could have been treated otherwise than with a high gibbet or a deep dungeon.

Nothing could exceed the rage, the consternation, the bewilderment of the rebels at the escape of Gualdi—with the exception perhaps of the Earl of Murray, who was glad that any circumstance had arisen to ensure the safety of his half-brother George Douglas. The feat so suddenly and so successfully executed on our hero's part, rendered most of the rebels perfectly wild with rage, or else struck them with consternation. From the description already given of the Stone Chamber, the reader may easily understand how impossible

it was for the persons shut up therein to summon anyone to their immediate assistance. There were no windows, no loopholes, no openings, except the *guichet* in the door and the grating in the chapel-floor overhead. They must therefore wait patiently until business should bring someone to draw back the bolt of the massive door which held them captive in that tomb-like place.

The three sons of the old Knight of Dunsley were severely wounded—the eldest on the upper part of the arm ; the second on the lower part, with a ghastly cut severing the tendons of the wrist ; the third in the thigh. It was with difficulty that in the two latter cases the blood could be stanchcd, before the first person came to open the door of the Stone Chamber.

We need not place on record the comments—some furious, others wonder-stricken—which the rebel chiefs passed upon the incident that saved Gualdi from the doom they had decided to inflict upon him. At length, as the passionate and impetuous became exhausted in their ireful outpourings and the more serious-minded recovered from their consternation, they began to discuss the various matters that were now so deeply interesting to themselves,—such as the loss of the expected treasure, the finding its way into the Queen's coffers, the raising of the royal army against them, the carrying off of the compact by Gualdi, and the probable use he might make of it. As for the old Knight of Dunsley—having seen that his sons' wounds were tended as well as circumstances would permit, he sat gloomy and serious, unable to wrestle against the grow-

ing apprehension that the spirit of his ancestor was really showing itself unpropitious, as Gualdi had declared, to the councils which were adopted in that room.

"What can have become of Chatelherault and Argyll?" exclaimed Murray, impatiently, for the hundredth time during an hour which elapsed after Gualdi's departure, and during which interval no one came to draw back the bolt and open the door of the Stone Chamber. "We can ill-afford the absence of two of our most important associates at the instant when we have so much serious matter for our deliberation."

"Perchance," said the Earl of Glencairn, "they are riding on and on, in the hope of meeting with George Douglas?"

"And surely," said the Earl of Rothes, "we may now expect to see George Douglas himself in the course of this day—unless the Italian Knight should take vengeance upon the hostage for the doom pronounced upon himself."

"I think not" said Murray, "that Gualdi will be thus ungenerous."

"And now, my lords, and fair sirs," said Kilkaldy of Grange, "how are we to look upon our plans, in the absence of this gold from England whereon we so confidently reckoned?"

"We must march at once towards the capital," said the Earl of Murray: "we must gather our powers with the utmost celerity—we must strike a blow ere the popish Queen shall succeed in raising a sufficient army to meet us! Chatelherault must speed to Kin-
niel—Argyll to Castle Campbell—

to raise their followers and join us within a few miles of Edinburgh."

"Hark! some one comes!" ejaculated Hamilton of Bothwell-haugh.

And true enough, the huge bolt was being drawn back—the door opened—and the young page already mentioned, appeared, with a sealed packet in his hand. His astonishment may be conceived when he learnt that Sir Lucio Gualdi had escaped by a desperate stratagem, instead of having been suffered to go forth free and uninjured.

"This despatch, my lord, has just been delivered," said the page, handing the packet to the Earl of Murray.

The nobleman proceeded to open it: but despite the command which he habitually exercised over his countenance, he could not now prevent his features from expressing a species of blank dismay.

Whence comes the letter? what tidings? "demanded several voices."

"It is from the Duke of Chatelherault," answered the Earl of Murray. "His Grace withdraws from the Association."

"Withdraws?" echoed the rebel chiefs.

"Yes—Withdraws absolutely and positively," continued Murray, in a tone of bitterest vexation.

"The reason he alleges is a dislike, on second thoughts, to take oaths of confederation, as if mere words were not binding amongst men of honour."

At this moment another page appeared, bearing a second despatch; and curiosity as well as suspense were excited to the highest degree while Murray was opening it.

"It is from the Earl of Argyll," said that nobleman, his countenance expressing a deep concentrated rage. "He also withdraws, on grounds about as frivolous as those just alleged by the Duke of Chatelherault. Are they both cowards? or are they traitors?"

Ejaculations of anger, astonishment, and regret burst forth on all sides:—but the old Knight of Dunsley said nothing: his chin rested upon his hand, and he reflected in sombre moodiness.

The chiefs were still discussing the two inauspicious incidents which had followed so closely upon the escape of Sir Lucio Gualdi—and they still remained in the Stone Chamber, from which only the Knight's three sons had been removed to their respective apartments—when steps were heard descending the stone stairs, and George Douglas made his appearance. His face was very pale; his features were rigid, and there was a strange expression upon them.

"Behold me, my lords and fair sirs," he said, in a tone of bitter reproach. "It is not through any generous consideration on your part that I am now alive to stand before ye! Ye would have committed a twofold crime, by murdering a generous foe who came in all confidence amongst ye, and by sacrificing a friend who was the hostage for his safety."

"George," said the Earl of Murray, "it was not I who would have done this. 'Twas the vote of the majority that would have decided it. Heaven knows how cordially I welcome you back amongst us—for you at least are a faithful and staunch adherent of our cause!"

George Douglas shook his head

with gloomy resolution, and said, "I am no longer one of ye. I come to take my leave of your cause."

"What! another desertion?" cried several indignant voices.

"Listen!" exclaimed Douglas. "I was at the mercy of Sir Lucio Gualdi—a prisoner in a place which ye all know well, and where I was compelled to submit to the terms that he dictated. He had my life at his disposal: but he spared it on condition that I should renounce the cause of treason, as he termed it, and abjure hostility against Mary Stuart. Appeal, if you disbelieve me to my two followers! They will tell you that at the mouth of the Hermit's Cave Sir Lucio Gualdi, on his return from Dunsley Tower, dictated the sole conditions on which he would suffer myself and my two servitors to live."

"The Hermit's Cave!" exclaimed the old Knight of Dunsley, starting up from his feet, and gazing with ghastly consternation upon George Douglas. "Was it at the mouth of the Hermit's Cave that this happened?"

"Yes—'twas there," replied Douglas, "that I was held captive as a hostage!—there also that I swore to renounce the cause of treason!"

"And I also renounce it!" ejaculated the Old Knight. "It is evidently accursed, though I deemed it blessed! The darkest portents warn us away from it! The spirit of my ancestor speaks eloquently through the ominous incidents of the Stone Chamber and the Hermit's Cave! Yes—if I had sworn ten thousand oaths, I would abandon such a cause as this!"

Having thus spoken, the old Knight abruptly quitted the vaulted apartment, and followed George Douglas, who was already half-way up the ascent of stone steps.

"And I also abandon it!"—repeated several other voices, the ejaculations being followed by the prompt and unceremonious departure of those who uttered them; so that in the space of a few minutes the Earl of Murray found himself deserted by all except some half-dozen of the chiefs who two hours back had assembled there.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RESIGNATION.

WE must now return to Queen Mary, whom we left with her husband and some of her attendants at the Provost of Edinburgh's suburban villa, the Kirk o'Field House. Mary Douglas breathed not a syllable in respect to the startling and tragic incidents which had taken place in the high road, and wherein she had borne no inconsiderable part: but it was by no means easy for the young damsel to assume a composure of countenance sufficient to cover the agitation and excitement which naturally resulted from all that occurred in respect to the attack upon Gualdi, and all that she had subsequently heard from his lips.

King Henry, it will be remembered, had partaken so copiously of the worthy Provost's wine that it was found necessary to put him to bed at the Kirk o'Field; and when he awoke in the morning at about seven o'clock, he found his

queenly bride, already dressed, seated by his couch. There was a soft melancholy in Mary Stuart's countenance, and a slight reproachfulness of tone in her voice, as she inquired how he felt? The ill-conditioned young monarch, recollecting enough of the preceding night's incidents to be aware that he had degraded himself in the presence of the Provost and his guests, dreaded the remonstrances of his delicate-minded wife, and therefore at once assumed an indignant and quarrelsome aspect. Mary Stuart's heart, combining a queenly pride with a womanly sensitiveness, swelled almost to bursting, and the tears traced their pearly paths down her beauteous cheeks. The soul of a savage might have melted at the spectacle—the arms of a barbarian would have opened to clasp such a wife—while the lips of even the most brutal would have implored pardon and forgiveness! But not so with him who possessed the vilest of natures in the form of an Adonis. With the false and cowardly idea that every additional blow he struck contributed to establish his mastery over the high spirited but loving creature who had done so much for him, he gave utterance to oaths which shocked her ears and to invectives which were fraught with the bitterness of gall.

Mary Stuart left him at the Provost's villa, and returned to Holyrood, accompanied by Lord and Lady Erskine, Mary Seaton, and Mary Douglas. She was pale and silent; but with the natural strength of her mind, and in the pride of her nature, she kept back the tears that rose up to the very brims of her eyes, and she stifled the sobs which were ready to burst

from her surcharged heart. Only a few short weeks since the suspicion had first flashed to her mind, in the gardens of the mansion at Perth, that Henry Darnley was not altogether the magnanimous and unselfish being that her fond imagination had depicted,—only a few weeks ago, we say, and now how completely was that suspicion confirmed ! how fatally were her dreams of bliss disenchanted !

In her saddened silent walk back from the Provost's villa to the palace of Holyrood on that unhappy morning, the Queen had to pass by the cemetery of the Collegiate Kirk of the Blessed Virgin, and also that of a monastery formerly tenanted by the Dominican Friars. Then, as the young Queen looked over the low palings into the enclosure where the cypress and the yew cast their deep shadows upon the graves, she almost envied those who had sunk down from life's feverish battle into the cool hollows of earth's quiet breast ; and, soul-sick, she felt as if *she* also would fain lie down and slumber beneath the shade of those trees and in the darkness of those graves, until wakened up by the golden beams of the Resurrection's morn. And thus, in a mournful and desponding condition of mind, did Mary Stuart retrace her steps to Holyrood ; and on reaching the palace, she at once shut herself up in her apartment, with no other company than her own sad thoughts. And how bitter were the tears she *then* shed, and how agonising the sobs which came up from her wounded heart, God only besides herself could know !

But at the expiration of an hour or so, when the drums beat at the

Market Cross and trumpets began to sound throughout all the streets of Edinburgh, the Queen summoned her handmaidens and bestowed the usual care upon her toilet. She was still pale, and there was a forced cheerfulness in her tone which could not deceive the eyes of her affectionate and devoted maidens, Mary Seaton and Mary Douglas. But as the sounds of martial music grew louder and more general throughout the city, and intelligence kept arriving at the palace that the royal proclamation calling for recruits was being responded to in a most enthusiastic manner, the colour came back to the cheeks of Mary Stuart—her eyes kindled—and she felt that though she might have already lost the love of her husband, there was still something worth living for in the love of her people.

It was not until the evening that the young King quitted the Provost's villa and made his appearance at the palace. With aching head and feverish blood, he had been compelled to keep his couch at the Kirk o'Field until past mid-day : then he had sat down to a well-spread table, whereon there was no lack of the Provost's good wines, to which the worthy magistrate himself was well inclined to do ample justice. Thus, in company with this functionary, and two or three other boon-companions who were staying as guests at the villa, the dissipated young King revelled in the juice of the grape until the evening, when it pleased him to return to the palace.

He found the Queen walking in the garden, attended only by Mary Seaton and Mary Douglas ; for the other two Maries had obtained leave

of absence for a few hours in consequence of letters which they had received in the afternoon, and which they had alleged to be invitations from some of their relatives residing in the metropolis.

As the King suddenly made his appearance at the end of the gravel-walk along which the Queen was proceeding at the moment, she at once perceived by the unsteadiness of his gait that he had again been devoting himself to the indulgences of the wine-cup; and unwilling that her handmaidens should again behold him in this disgraceful condition, she hastily bade them retire.

"Ah, 'tis well," he said, as he approached his royal bride, "that you have sent away those minions for the nonce. I wanted to have some little private discourse with you."

For a moment the Queen's heart had bounded with the fond hope that Henry was about to offer excuses for his brutal conduct of the morning; and Oh! with what readiness would she have forgiven him! how tenderly would her soul have melted in the effusion of a thousand assurances of pardon! And though his face was flushed with drinking, his eyes were blood-shot, his hair was in disorder, and his toilet was slovenly, yet how her heart yearned towards him!—and if he had but have spoken kindly to her, she would have seen in him naught but the beautiful, the elegant, and the fascinating Adonis she had first known. Vain hope! There was an impertinent flippancy mingled with an assumed air of authority which at once undeceived her.

"You may think it strange that I have remained absent the whole

day," continued the King; "but the truth is, I do not choose to put up with lectures, chidings, and remonstrances."

"Henry! this language to me?" said the Queen, bursting into tears. "Have you forgotten all the cruel and harsh things you said to me this morning?"

"Well" ejaculated the King, "you looked so sullen and cross——"

"Not so, Henry," interjected Mary, with gentleness, as she wiped away her tears. "I felt anxious on your account, because you looked so ill, and I was distressed to think that you should have done aught to degrade yourself in the presence of the Provost's guests. It was as a woman and as a wife I felt ——"

"Enough of this!" broke in the King, brutally. "Your words are reproaches now—and I do not chose to put up with them. In marrying you, I did not sell myself as a slave to a mistress. On the other hand, you, in marrying me ought to know that a husband has the rights of a master."

"In the name of all the blessed saints, dear Henry," said the Queen seizing his hand, straining it between both her own, and then pressing it to her lips, "do not let angry words pass between us! You spoke to me cruelly this morning—but I forgive you—Oh, I forgive you, Henry! for you know not how deeply, deeply I love you! Say but one kind word now, and I will forget that you were ever otherwise than kind towards me! Give me one fond smile, and I shall cease to think that you have ever been otherwise than fond!"

"Well, well, Masy, say no more about it," he replied, throwing his arm about her waist; for he began

to think that he might succeed better, after all, by means of cajolery than by intimidation, in carrying out a certain purpose which he had in view. "You know I love you—and therefore you should not provoke me by interfering with my pleasures. It may happen to the best of men to yield sometimes to the fumes of good wine. I need not tell *you*, my Mary, who are so well skilled in mythological lore, that the ancients adored a god of wine, and therefore elevated into a virtue a love for the juice of the grape. Besides, I could offer other excuses—oppressed with care as I am——"

"Care, Henry?" asked Mary; "what particular care have you at this moment?"

"The worst of all," replied the King: "an empty purse! I have debts—debts of honour——"

"Alas! you mean debts of the gaming-table," said the Queen, with a sigh.

"Reproaches again!" exclaimed the King, savagely: "reproaches in tone and look, if not in actual words!—so that when I endeavour to be kind and good to you, and to speak with blindest smiles, you have always something unpleasant to give me in return."

"Not so, Henry," the Queen hastened to rejoin. "There! smile once more," she added, caressing his cheek with her hand; "and believe me, I will not reproach you! As for the special care which weighs upon your mind, you do not stand alone in the experience thereof——"

"What!" ejaculated the King, "with an air of angry surprise: "would you pretend to experience he cares of poverty when you

have now five thousand pounds in your coffers?"

"But all that money is, as it were, bespoken, Henry," said the Queen. "Heard you not the drums beat and the trumpets sound throughout this day? Know you not that hundreds have already rushed to our standard, and that these will have swollen into thousands ere the week be past? To the maintenance of this army must the treasure be devoted."

"Tush! nonsense!" exclaimed the young King. "A portion of it can assuredly be spared for my needs."

"No, Henry," responded the Queen, with solemn gravity: "the purpose for which that money is designed must be deemed a sacred one. Providence itself appears to have sent it unto us through the medium of that brave Italian Knight who has done so much in our cause. Gold, therefore, which was given us in such a manner, may not be devoted to the payment of debts contracted amidst the wild license of dissipations."

"Then who am I," vociferated the enraged King, "that I should thus be spoken to? Am I a crowned phantom—a puppet with a diadem on its head! Am I a mere boy to be thus dictated to by every one. The wretched humpbacked Rizzio has more influence with you than I!"

"Rizzio is devoted to our interests, Henry," said the Queen; "and we ought to look upon him as a friend."

"I have no friends," said the King, in a species of boyish spitefulness. "I tell you that Rizzio has turned against me—with insolent hauteur—and my own wife refuses

me a few hundreds of the thousands that have fallen into her hands ! is this being a King ? or is it the veriest mockery of a kingly life which I am leading ? And do you love me ? or is your love a mere pretence ? But I will bear with it no longer ! I will leave Edinburgh—I will fly from Scotland—I will go to France—or I will even hie me to England and dare Elizabeth's wrath !”

“Heavens !” cried the poor Queen, half-distracted ; “how wildly and shockingly you talk, Henry !”

“You see that I am miserable,” he retorted, “and yet you wonder that I fly to the wine-cup, the gaming-table, or any other source of delirious pleasure wherein grief may be drowned !”

“Oh, if this be true, Henry—and that you merely plunge into dissipation because you have cares to perplex you, heaven forbid that I should refuse the succour that you demand !”—and the Queen, with her imagination so sanguine and so vivacious, suddenly pictured to herself a new prospect of happiness in the complete reformation of her husband. “You shall have the gold, Henry ! After all, it is but dross in comparison with our happiness ! Come with me !—thou shalt take what thou wilt !”

The young King smiled with an expression of triumphant complacency. He had foreseen that he should succeed in one way or another, either by means of cajolery or intimidation—and he had had recourse to both. He embraced his beauteous wife—more, however, for the sake of keeping her in her present liberal mood, than through a genuine feeling of gratitude ; and he hurried her to the treasure-

chamber where the gold had been deposited.

But where was the key ? It had been entrusted to the keeping of David Rizzio. A cloud passed over King Henry's features at this announcement. Rizzio ! Rizzio ! always Rizzio ! he thought to himself. Rizzio, who seemed ever destined to become acquainted with his weakest points—his ingratitude, his cowardice, his selfishness, his vindictiveness, his debauchery, his extravagance. But he curbed any further display of evil feelings in the presence of his royal bride, for fear lest another quarrel might result in the withdrawal of her promise to replenish his purse. Nevertheless, he felt more than ever embittered against David Rizzio ; and for this very reason he made an outward show of the utmost possible friendship towards the old man, when he presently made his appearance with the key of the treasure-chamber, a page having been sent to summon him for the purpose.

“Count out to his Grace five hundred gold pieces, good Signor David,” said the Queen. He hath need of them,” she added, curtly ; for Rizzio looked pained and astonished at the order he received to hand over so large a sum to one who would only waste it in libertinage and debauchery.

“Five hundred did your Highness say ?” asked the old man, meekly, yet deprecatingly.

“Yes, my worthy friend ! my excellent David !” said the King, coaxingly : “Five hundred—and without delay ! My royal and gracious wife is pleased to be generous towards me. Be quick, therefore, dear David.—Ah, by the bye, I was just now telling the Queen how

strong was your friendship towards me, and how sincerely I reciprocate it."

To this species of cajolery did the young King descend for fear lest David Rizzio should give utterance to a remonstrance which might possibly have the effect of inducing the Queen to reconsider her promised liberality. Mary Stuart herself was astonished at her husband's hypocrisy, to which she could not possibly blind herself; and her heart sank with a sickening sensation in her bosom as she felt how painful a thing it was for a wife to be compelled to look with contempt—almost with disgust—upon the being whom but a few months or even a few weeks back, she had looked upon as faultless. Mary Stuart was the more annoyed, inasmuch as with her quick intelligence she perceived that David Rizzio himself was pained and embarrassed by the fulsome-ness of that flattery whereof it was impossible that he could become the dupe.

"Enough of words," said the Queen, in a somewhat peremptory manner. "Count out the money, Master David."

The old man bowed with the profoundest respect, and proceeded to fulfil the Queen's mandate; but his hand trembled as he told forth from a bag the gold pieces which the young King so greedily longed to touch. At length the sum was counted out—the dissipated monarch secured it about his person, and was on the point of precipitating himself from the chamber, when struck by the uncouth rudeness of the proceeding, he turned to take his royal wife's hand and speak a syllable or two of thanks for her

bounty towards him. But at that very same instant he caught the look of profound commiseration and sorrow which David Rizzio was bending upon the Queen—though she herself saw it not, for she likewise was turning to quit the treasure-chamber and her back was at the moment towards Rizzio.

"I ought to have said thanks, dearest Mary, for the boon," exclaimed the King, instantaneously regaining his self-possession; "and thanks to thee also, kind David, for thy trouble in counting out the gold."

Thus speaking, with smiles of hypocritical blandness upon his lips, the youthful dissembler turned away, all the former bitterness of his soul doubly envenomed, if possible, against David Rizzio.

"Maledictions upon him! perdition take him! that vile hunch-back" muttered the King, audibly, when turning the angle of the passage leading from the treasure-chamber, he entered upon a wider corridor conducting towards the gardens.

"Ah, sire! is it your Grace?" exclaimed the Earl of Morton, whom the young King encountered at the moment; for the Earl, in his capacity of Lord High Chancellor, occupied apartments in Holyrood. "Your Highness seems to be offended with some one?"

"Offended! offended, eh?" and the young King was for a moment uncertain what reply to give.

"And if I may venture to guess, continued the Earl of Morton, "who it is that has had the audacity to offend your Grace, I would mention the name of David Rizzio."

King Henry looked earnestly in Morton's face for a few moments;

and there was something in the expression of that swarthy but handsome countenance, which induced the young Sovereign to reply, "Yes—I meant David Rizzio—whom I hate and detest above all living men!"

"Ah, sire, your Grace stands not alone in that feeling," responded Morton, with an ominous look.

"Say you so?" ejaculated the King, as if clutching eagerly at the idea of finding companions in his malignant aversion to the kind, good-hearted, and well-meaning old man. "I knew that Rizzio was often the object of ridicule and contempt—of scorn and laughter——"

"Aye—and of a deeper feeling likewise," rejoined Morton. "That vile humpback has already worked his way up from the post of Choirmaster to that of Private Secretary and Master of the Ceremonies; and if he be not checked in his career, I believe he will usurp the very place I hold, and rise to the Chancellorship itself!"

"And I, the King," said Henry, grinding his beautiful teeth with rage, "to become a puppet in his hands!"

"Sire," resumed the Earl of Morton—and darker and more ominous still became his looks—"there was once an English king that was troubled by a meddling ambitious statesman, who thought to make his own power greater than that of his Sovereign. But this king had merely to let drop a wish to the effect that some one would rid him of the obnoxious personage, when lo! the deed was done as quickly as a few loyal and gallant knights could travel from their king's presence to the shrine at Canterbury. Now, surely, sire, a

Scottish king may be equally well served by his own trusty knights. And, after all," added Morton, "the blood of David Rizzio is not worth that of Thomas a Becket!"

A diabolical expression of intelligence, savagely joyous and fiendishly vindictive, appeared upon the countenance of the King as the Lord Chancellor thus spoke; and so horrible an expression on a face of such masculine beauty, could be likened unto naught else but that which overspread the visage of Lucifer at the moment when falling from his angel-state, he became the ruler of pandemonium.

"And now, sire, that I have spoken with sufficient frankness," added the Earl of Morton, "'tis but for you to say the word whenever you shall deem that the proper moment is come. But silence until then!"

"I understand you, my lord—I understand you," said the King, seizing the Chancellor's hand and pressing it with nervous violence. "I understand you, my lord," he repeated. "Meanwhile silence! silence!"

The King and the Lord Chancellor exchanged looks of sinister significance, and separated—each revolving in his mind the diabolical project which had just received its inchoation, and which was soon destined to take shape and form.

Let us now return to Mary Stuart, whom we left in the treasure-chamber. She did not however tarry there many moments after the King's departure; for she felt that she had been guilty of a great weakness in yielding up a portion of that precious treasure to minister unto the extravagance of her husband—while, on the other

hand, her pride as a queen and a woman would not permit her to offer any excuse for her conduct. She therefore turned abruptly away from her faithful friend and confidential adviser, David Rizzio ; and striking into a different passage from that which her husband had followed, she hastened up to her boudoir. There, seating herself at the table on which stood the Venetian cabinet, she opened the flagree doors ; and taking forth those sombre symbols of mortality which have already been described, she contemplated them with feelings of sad presentiment. But suddenly restoring them to their place in the cabinet, she endeavoured to collect her spirits and repel the gloomy images which like shadowy and dimly-defined shapes of terror were crowding in upon her soul.

Not choosing to remain any longer alone, she agitated a silver bell, which brought Mary Seaton and Mary Douglas to her presence. She bade the junior Maid of Honour reach her one of her favourite volumes of poesy ; and opening its pages, she read aloud some passages, the melody of her own voice constituting a delightful musical accompaniment to the harmony of the verse. But presently the reading ceased : she relapsed into silence—and her head drooped upon her hand, which bathed itself as it were amidst the bright waves of her hair.

Mary Seaton remained standing near the chair of her royal mistress: Mary Douglas turned to the window to gaze upon the gorgeous sunset which was filling the western horizon with blended hues of purple and orange, crimson and gold.

Presently the door opened with

gentleness, and Mary Beaton glided into the room. On perceiving the pensive posture of the Queen, she stopped short for a moment, and then the next instant, as if obedient to a sudden impulse, she sank upon her knees. Mary Seaton was astonished at this proceeding, for there was something in the expression of the kneeling Maid of Honour's face which struck her as peculiar. But her wonder and anxiety were increased when she beheld Mary Fleming advance, also timidly and noiselessly, into the room, and take her station behind the Queen's chair—not with her usual confidence and self-possession of mien, but with a humbled and sorrowful look, and with her arms folded as if in a penitential manner over her bosom. The ejaculation which now fell from Mary Seaton's lips, aroused the Queen from the depth of her mournful reverie, and made Mary Douglas turn abruptly away from the window.

"Ah, minion, you have returned !" said the Queen, smiling with her wonted kindness upon Mary Beaton. "I hope that you have passed a few pleasant hours with your relatives. But why this suppliant posture, my dear friend ? What means this half-frightened and bewildered look ? Heavens ! is anything the matter ? Where, where is Mary Fleming ?"

"Here, gracious madam," said a low half-stifled voice : and Mary Fleming, gliding from behind the royal chair, sank down upon her knees by the side of Mary Beaton.

We need hardly inform our readers that the Queen and Mary Seaton were utterly unable to comprehend the meaning of this

conduct on the part of the two handmaidens : but Mary Douglas *did* comprehend it, and she was full well enabled to conjecture what was about to take place.

"Forgive me, gracious madam !" said Mary Beaton, her voice broken with sobs : "but I am about to leave your Highness ! I crave your royal permission—to—to—resign——"

"Resign ?" echoed Mary Stuart, in astonishment mingled with pain.

"Alas ! and I also must leave your Grace's service," said Mary Fleming, who was likewise weeping bitterly.

"Is this possible !" exclaimed the Queen :—then, as a sudden thought struck her, her countenance beamed in the radiant beauty of sunniest smiles, and she said, "I understand it all, my minions ! You are about to imitate the example of your former companion Mary Livingstone ? Yes, yes ! by those tell-tale blushes I see that I have guessed aright ! Well, dearest friends, I am not selfish ; and though it is painful for me to part from those who have been my associates since infancy, yet not for worlds would I stand in the way of your happiness !"

The Queen's voice had faltered as she went on speaking : it now failed her altogether, and was completely lost in the emotions which swelled in her bosom. Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming—who were far from being so wicked or so depraved as to be devoid of all proper feeling, but who had erred against their royal mistress chiefly through the levity and thoughtlessness of their dispositions—were absorbed in grief. The kind words

of the Queen touched them to the very quick.

"Ah, you sly creatures !" said Mary Stuart, recovering the power of speech, and smiling archly, though the tears still stood in her eyes ; "how silent and secret you have been in respect to those love passages which are now bringing you to the issue of matrimony ! Might I ask, sweet minions, who are the happy cavaliers that have won the affections of your hearts ?"

Deep as the crimson upon the leaves of the lilies of Japan when flushed with the warmth of the gorgeous East, were the blushes which dyed the cheeks of the two conscience-stricken handmaidens. They could give no response ; and whatever excuse or pretexts they might have prearranged to account for their resignation, they could not now find words wherein to shape them.

"What ! no answer ?" said the Queen. "Come, rise, dear minions—and retain not those suppliant postures ! You have no pardon to implore ; and if for the present you would rather keep your tender engagement secret, even from your Queen, be it so ! I will not urge you upon the point ! you know that you may ever reckon upon finding a friend in me——"

"Oh, that we should leave you thus !" cried Mary Beaton, who having risen up from her knees, now covered her face with her hands and wept convulsively.

"Would to heaven that we might remain with you !" said Mary Fleming, also much distressed.

"But I have no right to expect the sacrifice of your heart's affections and all your prospects of earthly happiness on my account,"

replied the Queen. "This grief which you display on leaving me proves your friendly devotedness—your loyalty; and naught now remains but that I should wish you both the enjoyment of perfect bliss. Ah, dear minions! this parting scene is necessarily a painful one! Let us not prolong it. Go, go, dear friends—and may all good angels bless ye!"

The Queen hastily but affectionately embraced Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming; and then Mary Seaton folded them one after another in her arms.

"Farewell," said Mary Douglas, merely extending her hand to the two departing Maids of Honour.

They pressed it in turns, and then precipitated themselves forth from the boudoir, overwhelmed with grief, with shame, and with confusion, at the manner in which their connexion had thus abruptly terminated with the royal mistress whom they had served since their infancy.

"It is thus," said Mary Stuart, with a profound sigh, as the door closed behind the two Maries,—"*it is thus that the circumstances of life compel us to separate from our best and dearest friends. And now I have but two Maries left!*"

The Queen's head again drooped upon her small white hand; and again she fell into a profound reverie.

"How coldly you bade farewell to our departed friends," said Mary Seaton in a whisper to Mary Douglas.

"I?" ejaculated that young maiden, with a start; then instantaneously recovering herself, she said, "But you must remember that I did not know them so well as you

do. To *you* they were almost as sisters: to *me* they were mere acquaintances."

Mary Seaton looked as if she were not exactly satisfied with the explanation, and as if she more than half suspected that there was something which Mary Douglas was keeping back. She however put no further question upon the subject; but as she meditated in silence upon it she could not help thinking that there was indeed something strange in the suddenness with which Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming had quitted the service of the Queen, and the absence of any positive or specific reason for such a step.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE QUEEN'S ARMY.

SIR LUCIO GUALDI, attended by his faithful page, returned to Holyrood Palace at a late hour in the night; and on the following morning he obtained an interview with Mary Douglas. From her lips he at once received the intelligence of the resignation of Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming, and their prompt departure from the royal dwelling.

"They received billets," said Mary Douglas, "which they pretended were from some of their kinsfolk inviting them to pass a few hours at their residences. But doubtless those letters were from the two English envoys, who, having learnt the failure of their murderous plot in reference to yourself, Lucio, saw the necessity of complying with all the conditions which you had imposed. Hence

the resignation of these two weak-minded and erring creatures ; and the poor Queen gave them credit for fidelity and loyal attachment unto the very last. They wept bitterly ; and the tears which they shed were not those of hypocrisy ; —they poured forth from the fountains of a real grief, doubtless united with a genuine sense of humiliation."

"And what pretext did they allege for a step so sudden and abrupt ?" asked Gualdi. "Surely the astute Randolph and the cunning Killigrew devised some plausible tales to put into the mouths of those maidens ?"

"Whatever promptings they might have received," rejoined Mary Douglas, "proved useless when matters came to an issue. They found not words wherewith to express themselves. But the Queen, with her usual vivacity of imagination, leapt to an immediate conclusion upon the point, and at once set the whole proceeding down as an affair of love and approaching matrimony. The two Maries left their royal mistress under this impression. But what excuses they could have made to their parents,—how the one could satisfy Lord Fleming and the other Lord Beaton, in respect to their sudden withdrawal from the Queen's service, is beyond my power of conjecture."

"Let us hope, dearest Mary," said Gualdi, "that their loss of place and position at Court will prove a salutary lesson to those young ladies, and that it will open their eyes to the true characters of the men by whose flattering tongues and specious wiles they have been led away from their duty. And now to speak of other subjects."

"That expedition to which you alluded yesterday morning," said Mary Douglas, "and on which my brother George was to accompany you ?—you will tell me now what it was ? I am prepared to hear that it was one of perilous venture : but the holy saints be thanked, dear Lucio, that thou hast returned in safety !"

The fine dark eyes of the beautiful damsel expressed all the love she felt for the handsome Italian, and all the gratitude she experienced that the hero of her heart's fondest admiration should have come back unscathed and unhurt.

"It was merely a visit to your kinsman the Earl of Murray," said Gualdi, in explanation of the nature of that enterprise. I fain would have saved him from the dangers and penalties towards which his treasonable career must inevitably hurry him : I entertained the hope of being enabled to induce him to stop short ere it became too late —"

"Oh, Lucio ! how generous, how noble on your part !" exclaimed Mary Douglas. "I comprehend it all ! You did this for my sake ! You know that my half-brother is dear to me ; and you have dared everything in venturing into his presence : for, alas ! he can have little love for thee, my Lucio, after all the defeats, the failures, and the humiliations he has sustained at thy hands ! But tell me—did you succeed in making an impression upon him ?"

"In that respect I have little or nothing of a satisfactory nature to announce," responded Gualdi. "I could not obtain an interview with the Earl of Murray alone. But my expedition has not been

without its uses ; for it afforded me an opportunity of obtaining certain information of a most important character in reference to the Queen's cause. In a word, dear Mary, the Duke of Chatelherault and the Earl of Argyll have withdrawn from the treasonable association : and doubtless their secession will be followed by that of other chieftains."

"These are indeed important tidings ?" exclaimed Mary Douglas. "Hasten, Lucio, and announce them to the Queen !"

"David Rizzio has done so by this time," answered Gualdi. "I bade him communicate the intelligence without mentioning me as his authority."

"You study to perform the noblest deeds, Lucio, or to render the most important services to your fellow creatures ; but still more strenuously do you strive to avoid receiving the credit that is due for them !"

"Look you, my Mary," responded the Knight, with a smile which displayed his brilliant teeth ; I like not to thrust myself forward unnecessarily. Remember, I am but an alien, a stranger, and a foreigner in this land ; and I seek not to render myself conspicuous, nor to court that royal favour, which if bestowed upon me, could scarcely fail to render me the object of envy, jealousy, and mistrust on the part of the Scottish peers and nobles attached to the Queen's Court. Therefore let my name be mentioned as little as possible in reference to any of the Queen's cause—Ah ! and let me say frankly, my Mary, that I have returned ere this to my country, but that thine eyes are my charmer !—thy

smiles have spells which retain me upon Scottish ground !"

The eyes whose magic power the Italian hero thus acknowledged, looked lovingly upon him—and the smiles whose witchery he experienced, shed their sweetest influence upon his soul—and the fair hand which he took, fondly clasped his own.

"Now, dearest Mary," he continued, after a brief pause, "the neck of the rebellion is as it were broken by the secession of Chatelherault and Argyll. From all that I have seen within the last twenty-four hours, I can assure you it would have proved a most formidable one if those two powerful chieftains had continued in their adhesion unto it. But now, under these different circumstances, your kinsman, the Earl of Murray, will be mad if he persevere !—aye, even as mad as he would be wicked in generating a civil war !"

"Alas !" said Mary Douglas, with a profound sigh, "he is obstinate and infatuated ; and from my knowledge of his temperament, I fear the very worst. But if I for sometime strove secretly to counteract his iniquitous designs against his half-sister, the Queen—you, dear Lucio, on the other hand, have now done all that a generous nature could prompt, towards bringing back that self-willed man towards the path of reason, honour, and duty."

"A more pleasing topic to touch upon, dear Mary," said Gualdi, "is the noble conduct which your brother George Douglas displayed towards me ; whereby the sincerest and firmest friendship is now cemented betwixt him and me. He devised a stratagem which

the resignation of these two weak-minded and erring creatures ; and the poor Queen gave them credit for fidelity and loyal attachment unto the very last. They wept bitterly ; and the tears which they shed were not those of hypocrisy ; —they poured forth from the fountains of a real grief, doubtless united with a genuine sense of humiliation."

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"A more pleasing topic to touch upon, dear Mary," said Gualdi, "is the noble conduct which your brother George Douglas displayed towards me ; whereby the sincerest and firmest friendship is now cemented betwixt him and me. He devised a stratagem which

placed him in the light of a hostage for my safety during my visit to the Earl of Murray——"

"Generous-hearted George !" ejaculated Mary Douglas. "Oh, I am glad, Lucio, that a brother of mine should thus have acted so magnanimously towards you !"

"And you may likewise rejoice, said Gualdi, "at the circumstance of your brother having kept his word and withdrawn himself from the cause of the rebels."

"Then doubtless there will be a breach betwixt him and his kinsfolk ;—for, alas !" added Mary, "nearly all the scions of our family, including even my own mother, are opposed to Queen Mary Stuart. Poor George ! he must prepare himself to meet the bitter reproaches of that mother whose feelings ought to be so different towards our Sovereign !"

"Tranquillize yourself on this head, dear Mary," answered Gualdi : "for the secession of George Douglas has been contrived in such a way as to save his honour, and absolve him from the imputation of having deserted the rebel cause in a treacherous or dastard manner. The same stratagem which your brother devised for the purpose of placing himself in the light of a hostage for my safety, also served as a means of giving the desired colour to his withdrawal from that cause. He had with him two attendants in whose presence it was necessary to proceed with caution and circumspection. But listen to the stratagem itself."

Gualdi then related the adventure relative to the Hermit's Cavern, and how George Douglas purposely suffered himself to be entrapped

therein, along with his two followers.

"After my return from the interview with the Earl of Murray, continued our hero, "I found my faithful page, Oliver Dunsyre, keeping watch at the mouth of the cavern. Then, in pursuance of the previous understanding which had taken place betwixt George Douglas and myself, I assumed an air of menacing strenness and a tone of fierce dictation, vowing that he should not come forth alive from that caves unless he bound himself by the most solemn oaths to adjure the rebel cause. It was with a becoming show of reluctance that he gave the pledge ; and we parted with an outward air of coolness, but in reality with the sincerest feelings of friendship in our hearts. In a word, Mary, the whole game so well played in the presence of your brother's two followers that they looked upon all its details as most genuine ; and they cannot fail to corroborate the averment that George Douglas acted under an irresistible coercion when he swore to renounce the cause of the rebels."

Some further discourse took place between Sir Lucio Gualdi and Mary Douglas on the present occasion ! but it is not necessary to record its details.

Five days afterwards, in the morning of the 26th of August, Queen Mary Stuart took the field in person with an army of five thousand men. The Earl of Morton commanded the advanced guard ; the Earl of Lennox led the van. The Queen would fain have bestowed an important post upon Sir Lucio Gualdi, and would have entrusted him with the third division of the army ; but he firmly

though respectfully refused the proffered honour. He gave no reason for declining the proposal ; but our readers may comprehend what his motives were—and Mary Douglas understood them. All that the Queen could succeed in doing was to induce our hero to accept the command of one hundred mounted harquebusiers,—a fine dashing body of men belonging to a somewhat superior class, and who had volunteered in the Queen's service. Some of them had belonged to the corps which Gualdi had collected and led on the memorable morning of the Queen's ride from Perth to Callander House ; and it was by their own special desire and request that Sir Lucio was now appointed to their command. Indeed, all the members of this volunteer corps burned to distinguish themselves ; and with such chivalrous aspirations, they were little likely to experience a narrow-minded jealousy at the idea of being led by a foreigner. On the contrary, the dashing gallantry and brilliant spirit of venturesomeness, tintured as it was with reckless daring, which characterized Gualdi, rendered him the very person whom such a corps would best like to accept as a commander, and whose leadership they would be most ready to follow with enthusiasm into the thickest of perils.

The Queen, with her royal husband, the members of her household, and the Lords of her Council, rode in the centre of the host. The number of the Maries had been again completed by the addition of the Lady Mary Lindsay and the Lady Mary Ross. The Queen wore a corslet of polished steel, inlaid with gold ; and for lightness as well

as for elegance of workmanship it was a perfect masterpiece of the armourer's craft. By her side hung a light sword, which might almost be termed a rapier, and the handle of which was brilliant with gems. One of the royal pages carried the Queen's shield, which was almond-shaped, and had the arms of Scotland emblazoned upon it. The armour which we have thus been describing was a present recently received from France, the donor being the Queen's aunt, the Duchess of Guise—a princess who was celebrated for her beauty and accomplishments. The skirt of the Queen's riding-dress—or foot-mantle, as it was in those times called—was of purple velvet embroidered with gold. She wore a round French cap of black velvet, and a tall plume of white ostrich feathers waved over her hand.

The Four Maries wore corslets of polished steel, without any inlaying of gold. They also wore swords by their sides, and pages carried their shields, which were round. The appearance of the Queen, with her Four Maries, was that of Amazonian gracefulness and elegance.

The King had arrayed himself in a suit of gilt armour, which shone with a dazzling effect in the rays of the sultry sun ; but we should observe that His Majesty had taken the precaution of having a common steel panoply in the care of his pages, ready for use in case of need. For be it well understood that though the vain conceited stripling was right well pleased to don the brilliant gilt armour, yet that he had no especial fancy for rendering himself conspicuous in the midst of a battle ; so that in case of a collision with the rebels, he had made up his

mind to exchange the costly suit for the commoner one, and his shield of heraldic blazonry for a target with a plain surface. Indeed King Henry could not exactly understand why it was necessary for a monarch to take the field in person at all ; but inasmuch as his heroic spouse had determined to accompany the army, her husband for very shame's sake dared not to refuse joining the martial host also. We should add that David Rizzio was likewise present in the midst of the royal cavalcade; but as the old man pretended not to be a warrior, afflicted with deformity as he was, he wore no armour, but merely had a sword slung to his side.

With respect to the rebels, the latest intelligence that had reached the Court was to the effect that the Earl of Murray still remained in arms, and it was rumoured that he had between two and three thousand men under him. The secession of the Duke of Chatelherault and the Earl of Argyll had been officially confirmed by the fact that they had fled into England, and had thence written letters to the Queen imploring her mercy. But as yet those appeals remained unanswered ; for Mary Stuart, by the advice of her Council, determined to await the issue of the present campaign ere she made up her mind how to deal with those malcontents who had already laid down their arms. The example of Chatelherault and Argyll had been followed—as the reader is aware, and as Gualdi had foreseen—by several others of the rebel chieftains; and so many desertions would have disheartened any other leader but the Earl of Murray. This noble man, however, persisted in upraising

the standard of rebellion; for he hugged the hope that if he could once reach Edinburgh, where he had numerous partisans, his army would be considerably reinforced, and in the capacity of a military dictator he might summon the Parliament to grant him the requisite supplies of money and pronounce the dethronement of the Queen.

The intelligence that Queen Mary had marched forth from the capital with an army of five thousand men, quickly reached the Earl of Murray, who in the meanwhile had removed his head-quarters from the London Hills farther northward, and had halted at Hamilton for the purpose of testing the disposition of the inhabitants of Glasgow, which was at no great distance. On the other hand, the Queen was equally well informed, through the medium of scouts and spies, of the movements of Murray ; and the royal army therefore marched in the direction of Glasgow, for the purpose of protecting that city from the rebels, and of intercepting them on their way to Edinburgh.

It was in the morning of the 26th of August, as we have already stated, that the Queen and her troops marched forth from Edinburgh ; and it was in the evening of the 30th that they reached Glasgow. There the Queen was received with the most loyal demonstrations by her subjects ; for while her beauty inspired them with interest, her heroic demeanour filled their hearts with admiration on her behalf.

At a very early hour on the following morning the Queen was again in the saddle ; and the royal host was wending its way along the bank of the Clyde towards Hamilton. The aspect of the heavens

was threatening ; dark masses of clouds were piling themselves up like huge rocks upon the sky, and every sign portended an approaching storm. But Mary Stuart, undaunted by the aspect of the weather, resolved upon pursuing the march in the hope of surprising the rebels at Hamilton. The young King no longer wore the shining gilt armour : a battle seemed to be imminent—he had therefore donned the plain steel panoply ; and the trappings of his steed were now of the plainest character, so that nothing might serve to render him a special mark for the weapons of the enemy. The Queen, with the deep love which she still entertained for her husband, could not feel altogether dissatisfied at the precautions which he thus took to insure his safety ; but on the other hand, with the spirit of a heroine, she would have been better pleased if he had displayed a bolder heart and assumed a more chivalrous demeanour.

The royal army pursued its way, in three divisions, along the bank of the Clyde ; while Sir Lucio Gualdi, with his gallant troop of harquebusiers, pushed on in advance to *reconnoitre* the enemy. In a short time the rain began to fall, and the bosom of the Clyde became ruffled with the sweeping wind, which was rapidly rising into a hurricane.

"Were it not well," said the King, in an undertone to the Queen, "that we should return to Glasgow ?—for there will presently be a horrible tempest. It is not for myself I speak," he hurriedly added : "but for you, dear Mary."

"Oh, fear nothing on my account, dear Henry !" exclaimed

the Queen, in a cheerful voice and with animated looks. "I feel as if the very elements themselves were favouring us."

"Perdition !" muttered the King, as the hailstones now began to rattle against his armour : "a pretty fashion of favouring us ! What do you mean ?" he peevishly demanded.

"I mean," replied Mary Stuart, "that the rebels will never expect us to move out of Glasgow in the face of such a tempest ; and we may therefore hope to take them by surprise at Hamilton.—Minions," cried the Queen, glancing round towards her handmaidens, "do ye fear the storm ?"

"We fear nothing, gracious madam," responded Mary Seaton, "when your Highness leads the way."

"Nothing !" added Mary Douglas, enthusiastically.

The other two Maries answered in a similar strain, and the young King bit his lip for vexation. He dared not again propose to go back ; but it was with an increasing reluctance that he went forward.

For it was now a furious storm that was raging : It was a tempest of a more terrible character than any that had been known in that district for many and many a long year. The rain poured down in torrents, mingled with hail, which pelted painfully against the faces that were exposed to it. The waters of the Clyde rose perceptibly ; the fields became morasses—the roads were flooded—the brooks were swollen into rivers. It was with a marvellous celerity that the storm thus developed its powers, and that the hurricane thus put

forth all its most terrible violence. The long lines of troops, encumbered with their armour, made their way heavily and with difficulty against the fury of the hurricane, which seemed something substantial and palpable which they had to encounter. It was as if they had to push forward tumbrils, or waggon, or ponderous machines, with a wearying effect. The horses showed signs of impatience or of terror, some becoming restive and almost unmanageable, others being cowed and smitten as it were with consternation. The Queen almost regretted that she had not turned back at the first intercession of her husband ; but it was now too late—for the army was already upwards of seven miles from Glasgow, and therefore more than half-way to Hamilton.

In such torrents did the rain continue to pour that surrounding objects could only be distinguished as if through a mist ; while the terrific voices in which the hurricane spoke, added to the horrors of the tempest. Indeed the storm was well calculated to fill the boldest mind with awe and to affright the sturdiest soul. It seemed as if nature itself were in a state of dissolution, and that the Deluge was throwing the world into chaos a second time. Immense trees, torn up by the roots as if they were fragile shrubs, were swept along over the fields by the power of the hurricane, or hurried onward by the whirling floods of the Clyde and its tributaries. Cattle and sheep were also borne past the toiling lines of the army ; the poor helpless animals were hurried with fearful velocity along by the sweeping fury of the torrents which

threatened to inundate the whole country.

It was now, in the midst of these most trying circumstances, that Mary Stuart displayed the veritable fortitude of a heroine. Drenched throughout all her apparel—her beauteous face smarting with the pelting of the hailstones—sometimes feeling as if she must literally be borne from her saddle by the irresistible power of the hurricane—the royal lady nevertheless spoke cheerfully to those around, and sought to encourage them with her magnanimity. As for the King, he had closed his vizor to protect his countenance from the hail ; and he sank into a sullen silence.

It was a sorry spectacle, that army which had marched forth so gay and brilliant from Glasgow at daybreak—now dragging its slow length along, with dripping plumes and torn pennons—the brightness of the warriors' armour dimmed—their pace sluggish—the step that erst was elastic, now heavy and toilsome—and the spirit of the very boldest seeming as if it were rapidly failing in the struggle against the fury of the elements !

And where was Gualdi, with his corps of harbuebusiers ? For a long time the gallant little troop had passed beyond the view of the advanced guard of the army ; and vainly did the eye seek to penetrate through the mist of the falling torrents to discern that corps amidst the flooded meadows. Onward toiled the royal host :—its progress was now becoming slower and slower, like that of a ship which has sprung a leak and in whose hold the water is rising higher and higher. And like that foundering vessel, did it seem as if the entire

host must be swallowed up by the increasing floods ! For the Clyde had now overflowed its banks, so that the entire district was rapidly becoming one broad sheet of water. The natural demarcations of that noble river could no longer be discerned ; and thus the passage of the army became every instant more perilous and more difficult. Deeply, deeply did Mary Stuart now regret that she had persisted in continuing the march in the face of the first omens of the storm ; but still did she maintain the mien of fortitude and the tone of encouragement.

The town of Hamilton is situated at the point of confluence of the Avon with the Clyde ; and the nearer drew the royal army to that spot, the more swollen became the floods, the more rapid the torrents, the more dangerous the eddies. Fortunately the hailstones had ceased to mingle with the rain ; the rain itself was abating ; but the hurricane continued to rush past with undiminished violence.

Suddenly the young King raised his vizor, as if in a paroxysm of desperate feelings ; and turning to the Queen, he said, with sullen, or almost savage abruptness, " What if Murray should be waiting for us yonder ? Do you mean to fight him with this wearied, spirit-broken, exhausted army ? "

" The Scottish spirit, Henry, is never broken," replied the Queen, firmly but mildly.

" Well, but human nature has its weaknesses," said the King, petulantly ; " and with all their bravery these men must feel themselves well-nigh beaten by the elements, before they come face to face with the enemy."

" What can we do ? " asked the Queen. " We cannot retrace our way : neither can we halt. We must push forward. Remember, our host is double the number of Murray's power ; and we shall have this advantage on our side."

" Great use was it for Gualdi to push forward his *reconnaissance*," said the King, casting about on whose head he could now best vent his spite. " He does not make his appearance, nor yet communicate with us ! We are still utterly at a loss to know where we may expect at any moment to find ourselves in the presence of the enemy."

" Rest assured," interrupted the Queen, " that it is not Sir Lucio Gualdi's fault if we remain thus ignorant of his proceedings."

" I do verily begin to fear," said Lord Erskine, who rode near the Queen, " that the brave Italian with his little troop must have been swept away by the flood or captured by the rebels. 'Tis otherwise unaccountable——"

" Behold, my lord ! " suddenly interrupted the Queen, pointing in a particular direction ; " a horseman is approaching ! Look yonder ! —There ! in the midst of that sheet of water ! "

" Yes," cried Erskine : " I now see the object indicated by your Grace ! But it looks like some poor animal floundering amidst the flood."

" No," rejoined the Queen, whose eyes were better than the nobleman's : " it is a horseman breasting the eddying waters ! "

" The cessation of the rain now completely opened the view of the district all around ; and the horseman was indeed seen making his way towards the royal army.

Several of the squires attached to the Earl of Morton's suite sped forward to meet the individual who was evidently the bearer of some tidings, most probably from Gualdi. Yes—it was so!—and most important was the intelligence that he brought—Sir Lucio, with his gallant corps, had pushed on to Hamilton; but it appeared that the Earl of Murray had evacuated the place shortly after daybreak, and had taken the direct route towards Edinburgh. Thus, while the royal army was marching along the southern bank of the Clyde, the rebels had crossed to the opposite side, and were making the best of their way upon the capital. Gualdi had gone in pursuit, to hang upon the rear of the enemy and watch their movements—that is to say, if he should be enabled to overtake them before they reached Edinburgh.

When this intelligence was communicated to the Queen, she turned deadly pale for a moment: she felt as if the star of her fortune had suddenly waned—as if the throne had glided from under her, and the diadem had fallen from her brow.

"There!" cried the King, in a paroxysm of rage, anguish, and terror; "all is lost!—the rebels will get possession of the capital! It is your fault, Mary, in persisting in this march to Hamilton! We ought to have tarried at Glasgow for further information respecting Murray's movements. All is lost! All is lost!"—and the young King shed tears and wrung his hands in despair.

"No!" exclaimed the Queen, as the colour suddenly rushed back to her cheeks and her eyes lighted up with the fire of noblest heroism:

"all is not lost! Here is an army that will yet fight for its Sovereign! Let us hasten in pursuit of the rebel host!"

It is not our purpose to elaborate any farther these details of the miserable march of the royal army on this memorable morning. Suffice it to say that when it had painfully struggled and wearily dragged itself through the floods at the confluence of the two rivers, it halted for a brief space at the town of Hamilton. Meanwhile the rebels had gained a start of three or four hours in their march upon Edinburgh; and they also had the advantage of pursuing their way through a district which remained unflooded. It therefore became more and more evident, as the Queen's army resumed its march, that all chance of overtaking the rebel host was utterly out of the question; while it was not for a moment to be hoped that Gualdi's little corps could achieve any feat that might prevent Murray's power from effecting an entry into Edinburgh.

It was late in the evening when the Queen, the King, and the Court, reached Callander House, where they alighted almost exhausted after the long, stormy, and painful march of that disastrous day.

The prospects of Mary Stuart's cause now seemed gloomy enough. That the rebels must have entered Edinburgh some hours previous, there could scarcely be a doubt. Would Murray succeed in winning over any considerable number of the inhabitants to his own side? would the possession of the metropolis at once give him a *prestige* most advantageous for his own views and most fatal to the interests of the Queen? All these questions

of Mary Stuart ask herself over
 futu over again ; and she knew not
 w to answer them. One thing
 Ma is however certain—that if Edin-
 an gh declared against her, she
 ha ould find it difficult to reduce that
 in ty to subjection by means of the
 to comparatively small army which
 he possessed.

in It was therefore an anxious,
 n everish, and suspenseful night
 d which the Queen now passed at
 l Callander House : though, with her
 accustomed fortitude, she strove
 to hide the real state of her feelings
 for the sake of those about her. As
 for her royal husband, he had re-
 course to the wine-flask in order to
 drown his cares.

At an early hour in the morning
 the members of the royal party
 were again astir ; and the chiefs
 began to marshal their respective
 th divisions of the army, from the
 Feighbouring towns and villages,
 Co arm-houses, barns and huts, where
 th the soldiers had found quarters for
 1 the night. A rumour now reached
 Callander House, to the effect that
 the rebels had really entered Edin-
 burgh in the afternoon of the prece-
 ding day : then came another re-
 port, stating that the Earl of Murray
 had issued a proclamation to the
 inhabitants, declaring that the parlia-
 ment of the kingdom should be at
 once assembled to decide in a legal
 and constitutional manner upon all
 moot points, so as to supersede the
 necessity of a civil war.

The Queen held a council at
 Callander House to deliberate upon
 the course which ought now to be
 pursued. Several of the councillors,
 on assembling, expressed their sur-
 prise that no tidings had been receiv-
 ed of Sir Lucio Guadi and his gallant
 corps of harquebusiers.

" I dare swear," said the young
 King, who was peevish, irritable,
 and spiteful after the previous night's
 potations,— " I dare swear he has
 abandoned a cause which he sees
 to be lost. The instinct of rats—
 eh ? Ha ! ha !"—and he laughed
 hysterically.

" Whatever may be the cause of
 Sir Lucio Gualdi's silence," said
 the Queen, pained at her young
 husband's ungenerous suspicion,
 " you may rest assured that he has
 not deserted the cause which he
 espoused so disinterestedly."

" Hah !" suddenly ejaculated the
 Earl of Morton : " what is that body
 of men whom I behold yonder ?"—
 and he threw open the casement in
 the recess of which he was standing
 at the time.

" Doubtless a division of our own
 army," said the Queen.

" Not so, madam," replied the
 Earl of Morton. " Your Grace's
 troops are now taking up a position
 on the northern and eastern side of
 Callander House. But that corps
 —"

" It may be the Italian Knight's,
 after all !" ejaculated the King.

" No, sire," rejoined Morton :
 " that body which you see yonder,
 consists of at least five or six hun-
 dred men—whereas Gualdi has but
 a hundred. Besides, yon corps is
 marching hitherward from the south
 —"

" True !" interjected the Queen ;
 " and if it were Sir Lucio coming
 from Edinburgh, his march would
 lie from the east. What can this
 mean ?—are they friends or foes ?"

Meanwhile the Four Maries—
 having armed themselves in readi-
 ness to set out when the troops
 should resume their march after the
 council—descended to the gardens,

to discuss amongst themselves the prospects of the royal cause, and deplore the gloom of its aspect. All of a sudden they beheld a warrior advancing towards them from a winding in the central avenue. He was armed in a complete panoply of steel : his shield was at his back—and he wore great heavy riding-boots. He was of tall stature, stoutly built, and of uncourtly gait. His complexion was swarthy : his profile was aquiline—his dark hair was cut short—he wore a moustache and beard. There was something unprepossessing in the face, though it was by no means an ugly one—while on the other hand it could not be denominated altogether handsome ; and whatsoever sinister there was in the look of this personage, was enhanced by a biemish in one of the eyes—a small white mark upon the pupil. For he was blind of this eye ; and his vision was therefore somewhat defective.

It was for this reason that as the Four Maries came in view, he did not immediately perceive that they were creatures of the gentler sex arrayed in Amazonian costume. He therefore at once drew his mighty two-handed sword from its sheath, exclaiming in a loud harsh voice, "Keep back, if ye know me ! Hear what I have to say !"

Mary Douglas and Mary Lindsay were walking together a little in advance of the other two Maries, when the warrior thus challenged them in that menacing style.

"He means us a mischief !" cried Mary Lindsay ; and her weapon flashed from its scabbard.

"'Tis the Border Earl !" 'tis Bothwell !" cried Mary Douglas, instantaneously recognising that

nobleman, as she drew her own brand from its scabbard.

"Heaven forefend that my weapon should clash against yours, fair ladies !" said the Earl of Bothwell, now distinguishing their sex, just at the moment that Mary Seaton and Mary Ross came up to their succour. "This is verily a charming spectacle—Ah ! *you*, fair lady, must bear the name of Douglas ? we have met before, ere I was banished from Holyrood. Now then I understand it all ! Aye, verily—for that is the Lady Mary Seaton. Ye therefore must be the Four Maries ?"

"And you," interjected Mary Seaton, now standing forward with heroic fortitude to address the proud Earl,—"*you*, my lord, are that traitor nobleman who for your plots against the Queen was outlawed and forced to fly into England—"

"Whence I have returned," responded Bothwell, "at the moment of the Queen's need, to offer her the service of this sword which hath never failed to do its work against the foe."

"Ah !" said Mary Seaton, "if this be indeed your lordship's purpose—"

"Can you doubt it, fair one ?" interrupted the Earl. "Do me the pleasure of announcing it to the Queen. I come alone in the first instance, to prove my good faith. But there,"—and he pointed over his shoulder towards the distant hill in the south,—"*there* is a knot of six hundred Border lances ready to do battle at the Queen's command."

"Go then, dear Mary—go," said Mary Seaton to Mary Douglas, who was the Maid of Honour in waiting for the day,—"*go* and make thi

announcement to her Highness. It is doubtless an important one!" she added in a whisper.

Mary Douglas hastened into the mansion, and ascended to the apartment where the Queen was holding council with her nobles.

"Pardon the intrusion, gracious madam," said Mary Douglas; "but the band which is advancing down the slope of yon hill, comes for a friendly purpose—the chief-tain himself is in the grounds below—the Earl of Bothwell——"

"Bothwell!" ejaculated the Queen, in mingled astonishment, and anger. "Twere strange if he who once sought my ruin should now come to save me!"

"No, no! not by *him*!" cried David Rizzio, who entered the room at the instant in a most excited state. "Saved by another!"

"Who? who?" demanded every voice.

"Gualdi," answered Rizzio: and how the heart of Mary Douglas bounded at the name! "The exploit was brilliant!—the news has just arrived! The Knight cut his way through the rebels—the harquebusiers poured in their deadly volleys—they reached the Castle, where the Governor and troops were wavering and irresolute! But Gualdi lost not a moment! He seized upon the cannon—he fired upon the rebels—and—and—the result——"

"What is the result, good signor?" asked the Queen, seeing that the old man faltered and hesitated.

"The result, gracious madam," he responded, "is that Murray and his rebel hordes have fled from Edinburgh—yes, fled in disorder!—that your capital is open to receive you—but, also! that the hero of

this brilliant exploit is wounded—not mortally—but—but—severely——"

"What! the brave Gualdi?" cried the Queen, in a tone of the deepest concern.

Poor Mary Douglas heard no more: the ejaculation of anguish which had risen up to her lips, died there without finding a vent—a sudden dizziness came over her—and she sank senseless upon a sofa close by.

CHAPTER XX.

THE WOUNDED KNIGHT.

AMIDST the excitement which prevailed in the council-chamber, the fainting of Mary Douglas was unperceived by several present—while by others it was attributed to an overwhelming sense of joy experienced by the faithful maiden on hearing of the complete triumph of the cause of her royal mistress. But David Rizzio—who had all along suspected the attachment subsisting between the Scottish damsel and the handsome Italian Knight—at once beheld in the incident a confirmation of that idea; while Mary Stuart was now for the first time struck by the thought that such a tender sentiment might possibly exist in that quarter. Mary Douglas was speedily removed to another apartment—where the Queen, with characteristic kindness, assisting in ministering to her restoration; and then, with an equal degree of delicate thoughtfulness, she at once formed a pretext for sending the young damsel to Edinburgh.

Summoning Rizzio to her presence, the Queen said, "Signor David, you will at once take horse and proceed to the capital—firstly, that by your speed you may prove how prompt I am in conveying to Sir Lucio Gualdi my grateful thanks for this crowning service which he has rendered unto my cause ; and, secondly, that you may take care that the gallant Knight is duly ministered unto. In a word, let him be surrounded with all possible attentions.—And you, sweet minion," added the Queen, turning to Mary Douglas, "will accompany Master Rizzio—aye, and the Lady Mary Seaton will proceed with you likewise ; for so good a warrior as our Italian champion merits to be nursed by the fairest hands."

Mary Douglas, who was now perfectly recovered, knelt to kiss the Queen's hand in token of obedience to her commands ; and the movement enabled her to conceal the blushes which were mantling on her cheeks, as she more than half suspected that the secret of her love had been betrayed by that fainting-fit in the council-chamber.

"May it please your Grace to remember," said David Rizzio, "that the Earl of Bothwell awaits your royal answer."

"Ah ! true !" said the Queen. "We had forgotten that help was proffered from one quarter while success had already been achieved for us in another. But our response to the Earl of Bothwell may be promptly given—as indeed under circumstances it ought to be. For how stands the case ? Some while since we banished him from our Court on account of treasonable designs against our person : but

now, at the moment when our need appeared the greatest, he comes prepared to draw his sword in our defence. Surely there must be true loyalty mingled with a veritable penitence in this proceeding ; and 'twere the very height of churlish ingratitude on our part," added the generous-minded Queen, "to refuse forgiveness to one who comes to implore it in so seemly a style."

There was a pause for a few moments, during which Rizzio seemed to be reflecting dubiously upon the words which the Queen had just spoken.

"You are not altogether sure, my faithful friend," Mary Stuart went on to say, "that I am acting rightly in thus overlooking the past treasons of the Earl of Bothwell ? I know that you like him not : you mistrust him—and not without ground ; for his character is that of a bold, reckless, desperate man. But how withstand the proofs of contrition and fealty which he this day affords us ? Besides, apart from the sentiment of gratitude and the feeling of generosity, there is the policy of conciliation. For is he not the most powerful of all the Border Chiefs ? and shall we not be gaining a valuable partisan in case of fresh difficulties or turmoils ? Therefore," added the Queen, "there can be no second thought how we are to act on this occasion !"

And it was done as Mary Stuart determined. She returned to the council-chamber, where in the presence of her husband and the great dignitaries of her Court, she received the Earl of Bothwell, assuring him of her forgiveness for the past, and receiving protestations

of unswerving allegiance for the future.

Meanwhile David Rizzio, with Mary Seaton and Mary Douglas, and a small party of attendants, had taken horse and were proceeding with the utmost despatch towards the capital. During an indispensable but brief halt at a midway stage, they learnt ampler details than those which had been hurriedly conveyed to Rizzio at Callander House, relative to the brilliant exploit which had cleared Edinburgh of the rebels. It appeared that when the Earl of Murray and his host had entered the capital in the afternoon of the preceding day, he was only lukewarmly received by those whom he had reckoned upon as his partisans, while the great bulk of the inhabitants regarded him with coldness and disfavour. He summoned the Castle to surrender; but the governor, being a time-serving person, was inclined to temporise until he could obtain positive information as to which cause stood the better chance of success. The bulk of Murray's troops remained under arms all night, at the base of the Castle hill, and in the principal squares and marketplaces, that they might be in readiness for any emergency. It was just as the day was dawning that Gualdi and his arquebusiers suddenly presented themselves at one of the city-gates, overpowered the guard, and learnt the actual state of affairs within the walls of the metropolis. Gualdi's course was at once chosen: it involved one of the most daring exploits that it was possible to conceive, with the alternative of perishing in the attempt. But the arquebusiers were to a man prepared to follow

their dashing young leader; and through Murray's troops they succeeded in cutting their way by an almost miraculous display of valour. They reached the Castle, where an undecided commandant and wavering garrison chose not to oppose their entry. Then Gualdi and his followers, seizing on the ordnance, commenced a cannonade upon the rebels, who for some little while returned the fire with vigour, and even endeavoured to scale the Castle heights, the Earl of Murray having flown with reinforcements to lead the attack in person. The garrison of the fortalice, inspired by the valour of our hero and his gallant little band, then pronounced loudly in the royal cause; and the governor was compelled to take a similar decisive part. The result was the repulse of the rebel army; and the instant that Murray's soldiers turned to fly, the attitude of the citizens suddenly showed itself in overt hostility against them. Thus was the rebellion effectually crushed but at the moment of triumph for the Queen's cause, one of the last straggling shots that were fired by the retreating enemy, whom Gualdi was closely pursuing, struck the hero, and penetrating the steel corslet, entered the breast near the region of the heart. The faithful Oliver Dunsyre at once caused his beloved master to be transported to his apartments at Holyrood Palace; and the moment a surgeon had examined the wound, the youth penned a hasty despatch which he sent off to David Rizzio at Callander House.

The reader may more easily imagine than we can describe the painful anxiety of Mary Douglas on account of the object of her

enthusiastic love—the hero of her heart's fervid admiration! Every inch of the ground seemed a mile—every moment of time appeared an hour until Holyrood Palace was reached. And there the gallant Roman Knight was found, lying in his couch, sleeping through exhaustion—still hovering between life and death—and in a condition really more dangerous than that which the surgeon had at first imagined. But Mary Douglas, with the mental fortitude that was natural to her, knew how to keep down the outward evidences of grief in order to concentrate all her energies for the purpose of fulfilling the part of nurse, wherein she was to be assisted by Mary Seaton, during the day-time: for David Rizzio undertook to share with Oliver Dunsyre the task of watching on the wounded warrior's side by night.

We should here observe that during the few hours which the Earl of Murray passed in Edinburgh he had taken up his quarters at Holyrood Palace—whence, with all assumed authority of a military dictator, he had issued his proclamation to the effect that he intended to summon the parliament with the least possible delay. But so suddenly had a reverse of fortune overtaken the rebel nobleman, and so precipitate had been his flight from the capital, that he had left behind him a part of his baggage, including a portfolio of private papers at the palace. These articles were at once taken possession of and inspected by David Rizzio, on his arrival at the royal dwelling.

In the evening of that same day Queen Mary Stuart entered the capital at the head of her army, and

was received with enthusiastic acclamations by the populace—while banners floated from every tower, and the cannon which had so recently dealt such deadly destruction to her enemies, thundered forth salutes in honour of her return.

It was a fortnight after the incidents which we have just related, that David Rizzio was suddenly summoned into the Queen's presence. The King was with her at the time: the Earl of Lennox was likewise there: the Ladies Mary Lindsay and Mary Ross were in attendance upon their royal mistress. The Queen held a letter in her hand; and she was glancing with joyous looks from her husband to her father-in-law, the Earl of Lennox, when Rizzio made his appearance.

"Signor David," said the Queen, "we have received a joyous piece of intelligence, for which it is seemly that we should return a prompt expression of gratefulness. 'Tis a significant overture of reconciliation on the Queen of England's part, and as such must be accepted. Nay, more—the letter which I hold in my hand, is a direct communication to myself, from my royal cousin Elizabeth of England. Therefore, good Signor David, take your pen, I say, and draw me up such a reply as it is bounden for me to give in acknowledgment of the release of my royal husband's beloved mother, the Countess of Lennox, from captivity in the Tower of London."

"I humbly offer my sincerest congratulations upon this event," said Rizzio, with a low bow, but with an air that expressed no surprise at the announcement.

"Here, take the letter, my worthy

friend," resumed the Queen, "and see in what style my cousin Elizabeth of England writes unto me in order that you may know how to frame the draft of the answer which I will presently copy."

"I perceive," said Rizzio, after glancing over the letter, "that the Queen of England herein conveys the assurance to your Grace that it is as a proof of her royal friendship——"

"That my mother is released," broke in the King, petulantly. "Well, what then? We did not send for you to offer your comments, Master David—but to do your duty as private secretary and draw up the reply."

Rizzio bowed with his wonted meekness at this unmerited rebuke, and was turning towards the table, where writing-materials lay, when the Queen said, "Nay, be not impatient, Henry, with our worthy friend and faithful adviser. His comments are rarely out of place. Say then, Master David, what remark was it you were about to make?"

"Methought it right," replied Rizzio, "that your Majesties"—addressing both the Queen and King together—"should be enabled to estimate the true value of the Queen of England's friendship, and acknowledge the merit of an action where that merit is really due. In one word, therefore, let me assure your Highness that it is through the secret, unpretending, but not the less potent intervention of *another* that the Countess of Lennox is about to be restored to her kindred and her home."

"By heaven!" cried the King, with a bitter sneer, "this arrogant fellow would fain usurp the merit

of an action to which he has no more claim than a pig has to the coronet of a peer!"

"Pardon me, sire, for the contradiction," said Rizzio, bearing the taunt with his usual martyred submissiveness; "but I alluded not to myself. It was to another——"

"And that other?" asked the Queen.

"Sir Lucio Gualdi," rejoined Rizzio.

Gualdi! "Gualdi!" muttered the envious young King between his teeth: "always Gualdi! Curse him! may he perish! for I hate him more and more!"—and no wonder, for the ill-conditioned stripling felt that he himself ought to have been the hero of many of those exploits which the Italian Knight had achieved on behalf of the Scottish Queen.

"What say you, Henry?" inquired Mary Stuart: "what words are you whispering to yourself?"

"Oh, simply that we now seem to owe another debt of gratitude to Sir Lucio:"—and the young monarch's smile suddenly became full of the blandest hypocrisy.

"And perhaps the time has now come," resumed David Rizzio,—"or at least no moment could be more opportune, for the revelation of certain facts which ought to be made known unto your Majesties. In the first place, it is true, I repeat that to Sir Lucio Gualdi may be ascribed the release of the Countess of Lennox. It will be remembered that he kept possession of the contents of the satchel-purse, with the secret documents in cipher——"

"Yes, I recollect well," said the Queen: "Proceed, worthy signor."

"I know not the precise course which Sir Lucio must have adop-

ted," continued the old man ; " but of this I am confident, that he used those secret documents as a means of coercion and intimidation in order to accomplish a good end. For when I have watched at his side by night, he has spoken in the ravings of fever—and in his delirium has he unconsciously betrayed those things which would otherwise have never passed his lips. And if I proclaim these facts now, it is simply because I know that your most gracious Majesty will be well pleased to learn the full extent of the services which the magnanimous Sir Lucio Gualdi has rendered. I handed to your Grace those letters from the Duke of Chatelherault and the Earl of Argyll to the Earl of Murray, renouncing the rebel cause, and which letters were found in the Earl of Murray's portfolio of papers that he left behind him. Those letters bear a certain date——"

"What date?" demanded the young King, impatiently.

"The date," replied Rizzio, "of the very day on which Sir Lucio Gualdi visited Dunsley Tower."

"And what of that?" exclaimed the stripling monarch. "What more of this nonsense have you to tell us?"

"Only, sire," rejoined Rizzio, "that in Sir Lucio Gualdi's portmanteau were found the handles of two broken swords, unmistakable trophies of victory on the hero's part! And those swords belonged to the Duke of Chatelherault and the Earl of Argyll."

"Ah! is it so?" cried the Queen, in accents of grateful admiration. "Then there can no longer be a doubt that it was Sir Lucio Gualdi's weapon which rendered him the dictator of terms which those rebel

chiefs were constrained to obey! Have you aught else to tell us, good signor, of the services of the Roman Knight on our behalf?"

The old man's countenance now wore an expression of mingled distress and indecision; and as his embarrassment seemed to increase, the King maliciously jumped to the conclusion that some matter was now involved which was calculated to wound Rizzio's feelings. He therefore exclaimed, "Come, speak out! Let us lose nothing," he added with a sneer, "which in any way pertains to our brave and excellent champion, Sir Lucio Gualdi!"

"Why do you hesitate to speak my worthy friend?" asked the Queen, with kind voice and gentle manner.

"I know not whether to speak out frankly or not," responded the old man. "It is something which your Grace ought to know—but which will nevertheless afflict you much. And then too—as I likewise gathered the secret from the unconscious ravings of the Knight—in his delirium—I know not that I ought to betray it. But Oliver Dunsyre has heard the same—perhaps the Ladies Mary Seaton and Mary Douglas likewise—I know not——"

"Come, then!" ejaculated the King, now burning with curiosity, "a secret that is already known to so many can be but little of a secret after all! So speak, Master David—and beat no longer about the bush."

The Queen made an affirmative sign to Rizzio,—who accordingly went on to say, but with distressed look and hesitating tone, "Your Majesty's generous heart will be

grieved—wounded—aye, almost rent—with the intelligence that there were until lately spies and traitresses about your royal person—but that Sir Lucio, while resolving to remove them from the sphere of their mischief, nevertheless in his generosity sought to save them from the crushing shame and overwhelming degradation of exposure. And thus—

“Holy saints guard us!” murmured the Queen, cruelly shocked by the intelligence. “I now understand it all! The two Marias whom I loved so well!”—and the Queen shed tears.

“The jades!” ejaculated the King: “they have been treated all too leniently! I dare be sworn that ’twas they who betrayed our movements on the morning of the ride from Perth to Callander House.”

“There can be no doubt of it,” said the Earl of Lennox. “Pity ’tis that they are beautiful!—for good looks excite one’s sympathy—”

“And thus,” suddenly exclaimed the Queen, as she dried her tears, “the brave and intelligent Sir Lucio Gualdi has served our cause in every possible way, and watched over our interests alike in public and in private.”

“Of a verity,” broke in the young King, as a suspicion flashed across his mind, “one would think that this Roman adventurer had converted himself into a knighterrant on account of some bold and presumptuous passion. But, by the saints, if he dare lift his audacious looks so high—”

“Shame, shame, Henry!” interrupted the Queen, her countenance flushing with mingled confu-

sion and indignation at the coarse and indelicate allusion. “Sir Lucio Gualdi is the very type and personification of the noblest chivalry; and if I have read the secret of his heart aright, his affections are conferred upon one who deserves all his manly love. But, Ah! tell us, worthy Signor Rizzio, how fares it with the good Knight? I ought to have asked this question before—though, daily, since he received his wound in our cause, have I sent to make special inquiries concerning his health.”

“Sir Lucio has progressed favourably for the last day or two,” replied the worthy old man; “and he feels himself sufficiently strong to leave his chamber for an hour or so, and walk in the garden. He bade me inform your Majesty that whensoever it may please you to receive him, he will pay his respects unto your Grace.”

“Now! this moment!” cried the Queen. “Let me delay not an instant in offering my congratulations for his recovery! Go, good Rizzio.”

The secretary bowed, and quitted the apartment to execute the royal bidding; and in a very few minutes he returned, ushering in Sir Lucio Gualdi. Our hero was very pale; but that very pallor tended to impart a touching interest to the masculine beauty of his countenance—especially when it was remembered in what brilliant exploit he had sustained the injury which had produced that paleness. He was dressed in an elegant Court costume, which showed off the admirable symmetry of his figure to the best advantage.

Mary Seaton and Mary Douglas also made their appearance at the

same time ; and they learnt, in hasty whispers from the lips of Mary Lindsay and Mary Ross, the particulars of all that had just been passing, and how David Rizzio had been detailing to the Queen the various great generous deeds which Gualdi would fain have kept secret within his own breast. Then was it that Mary Seaton learnt for the first time the treachery of Mary Beaton and Mary Fleming : she now saw likewise that Mary Douglas had known it all along ; and she was no longer surprised at the coldness with which the latter had bidden those traitresses farewell on the evening of their resignation.

Scarcely had the Queen offered, with kinder words and most amiable smiles, suitable congratulations to the valiant champion of her cause, when a page entered the apartment and whispered something in the ear of David Rizzio. The youth then stepped back, and remained in the room, evidently waiting for some instructions ; while Rizzio, bowing to the Queen, said, " May it please your Grace, there be some fifty or sixty persons arrived from Italy, the chief of whom asks for speech of Sir Lucio Gualdi. He gives his name as the Count di Guardia."

It was according to Court etiquette that David Rizzio, in his capacity of Master of the Ceremonies, should make this announcement direct to the Queen, although in reality it only regarded our hero. As for Sir Lucio himself, he gave a sudden but slight start at the intelligence, and ejaculated in an undertone, " Oh, so soon !"

" By all means let the Count di Guardia be introduced," the Queen hastened to say. " Any friend of Lucio Gualdi must be welcome

at the Scottish Court. Besides, if I mistake not, I have before heard mention made of the name of the Count di Guardia. Was he not attached to the suite of the Roman Nuncio at the English Court some two or three years ago, together with Prince Cassio di Rimini, the unfortunate nobleman who met his death in the waters of the Tay ?"

" The Count di Guardia was second *attache* in that Embassy to which your Grace alludes," replied our hero, with a bow.

" And the Prince di Rimini was the first *attache* therefore ?" said the Queen. " Perchance the Count di Guardia now seeks our Scottish shores for the purpose of dropping a tear over the tomb of his deceased friend in the Abbey of Lindores ?"

" Perhaps it were as well, gracious madam," said our hero, " if I were to retire and welcome the Count in the first instance——"

" Not so !" ejaculated the Queen, energetically. " Let the Count di Guardia behold with his own eyes how distinguished a position Sir Lucio Gualdi occupies in the estimation of the Scottish Court. Aye—and he shall learn, too, that if you bear no higher title than that of knight, it is through no want of grateful profferings on our part of lordships, and baronies, and earldoms—but that with a modesty which even transcends your valour, you have persisted in the refusal of them all !"

Meanwhile David Rizzio had quitted the apartment ; but he now returned, ushering in a middle-aged and sedate looking personage, of distinguished appearance, and very handsomely apparelled.

" Count di Guardia, exclaimed

David Rizzio, conducting the nobleman by the hand, with the usual ceremony, towards the Queen.

Mary Stuart proffered her hand, which the Count, while sinking respectfully on one knee, conveyed to his lips.

"Start not, dearest one!" hastily whispered our hero in the ear of Mary Douglas: "start not, I say, at what may now take place! Forgive me the little deception—pardon me!"

Mary Douglas looked bewildered and astonished—almost affrighted: but her lover bent upon her a reassuring smile; and then turned to receive the Count di Guardia, who had just finished paying his homage to the Queen and bowing to the King.

"The summons of your lordship has been obeyed with all possible promptitude," said the Count, bowing even more humbly and respectfully to our hero than he had just done to the King. "I bear from our holy father the Pope divers despatches for your Highness, which I shall soon have the honour of presenting."

These words "Lordship" and "Highness"—those sounding titles, together with the air of profoundest respect with which, Count di Guardia addressed our hero—excited feelings of the greatest surprise and astonishment on the part of those who beheld the scene: for it was clear that some proud and lofty name had hitherto been concealed under the humble denomination of *Sir Lucio Gualdi*.

"Signor Rizzio," said the Queen, with a smile of arch good nature, "methinks that you have still some duty to perform as Master of the

Ceremonies, and still some name to announce."

"I confess that, like others present," responded Rizzio, "I have been smitten with wonder: but if surmise may now serve me, it can be none other than his Highness Prince Cassio di Rimini himself whom I ought to announce."

"The conjecture is right, my worthy friend," said the Prince—for such our hero really was; and he bowed with all his high-bred grace and elegance to the Queen. "Pardon me, gracious Sovereign, if during my sojourn of two months and upwards upon the Scottish soil I have borne a name which is not mine own——"

"But under which name," hastily interposed the Queen, "your Highness has performed deeds calculated to render you even more illustrious than by your princely rank you already were. Ah! no wonder that *you*, a Prince of Italy, should have refused the poor lordships and earldoms of Scotland!—so that now there is naught beyond our reiterated thanks which we may venture to offer your Highness for the manifold services received at your hands."

"Yes," said the Prince di Rimini, "there is a boon which your Majesty may bestow upon me!—a favour which will far outweigh all the poor services I may have had it in my power to render!"—Then, as the flush of manly pride and joy suffused the paleness of the hero's cheeks, he turned towards Mary Douglas, and taking her hand, said to the Queen, "Your Grace's consent that this hand shall become mine is the boon that I crave—the favour that I ask!"

Mary Stuart flung upon her royal

husband a rapid look, as much as to say, "You see that I was right when I told you that his affections were engaged!"—then turning her eyes upon the lovers, she said, with all the fervour of her generous and grateful heart, "You ask my consent to your union? Oh, with how much joy do I give it! May heaven shower down its choicest blessings upon your heads!"

Mary Douglas was about to sink at the Queen's feet: but her royal mistress hastened to enfold the beauteous maiden in her arms—and the tears which denoted unutterable feelings, mingled as they flowed from their eyes. It was a most affecting scene: the other three Maries wept, though smiles of sympathetic happiness were upon their lips; and as for poor David Rizzio, he turned away and whimpered like a child. Mary Douglas received the congratulations of those present: for even the young King himself thought it seemly and expedient to put on his most affable and courteous demeanour upon such an occasion as this!

"But you must now tell us," said the Queen, when the general excitement of the feelings had somewhat subsided,—“you must tell us, my lord, what inducements you had for veiling your princely rank beneath a comparatively humble title?"

"The explanation can be given in a few words, madam," replied our hero. "Your Grace already knows how his Holiness the Pope confided to me the mission which brought me to the Scottish shores: nor need I repeat the woeful tale how shipwreck flung me upon the banks of the Tay, the sole survivor of the catastrophe. All the people

of my suite had perished: I was alone—an alien—a stranger—without even as much as a valet or the lowest menial to minister unto me! My pride would not brook the idea of appearing at the Scottish Court, to proclaim my princely rank, in a plight so sorry and so mean. But there was another reason which perhaps had still greater weight to induce me to adopt a temporary *incognito*. It was because I had heard rumours of probable treachery on the part of the Associate Lords, with a view to prevent, or at least to delay the marriage of your Majesty; and methought therefore that the precious document of which I was the bearer, would be safer in my custody as a humble and unpretending traveller, than it would have been if I had journeyed ostentatiously under my real name. Thus was it that after mature deliberation with myself, I resolved upon adopting an *incognito*, and on the first occasion that I was asked for a name, I suddenly bethought me of adopting that of my unfortunate friend and *attache*, Sir Lucio Gualdi."

"Ah! then," said the Queen, "the veritable Sir Lucio Gualdi actually perished?"

"Yes—and found sepulture at Lindores," rejoined the Prince di Ramini.

But when your Highness had acquitted yourself of your mission, said the Queen, "and had delivered the papal dispensation into my hands, wherefore did you not declare your rank, my lord, that I might have furnished you a becoming suite entertained you in a seemly manner——"

"Gracious madam," rejoined the Prince, "here again the explanation is easy. Scarcely was I cast upon

the Scottish soil, when I found myself involved in two distinct and separate ways, both of which however rendered it most interesting and expedient to preserve for the while the semblance of a humble Knight. In the first place I was at once drawn into the channel of those circumstances which so nearly concerned the safety and welfare of your Majesty ; and I felt that as plain Sir Lucio Gualdi I could serve your cause more effectually and unpretendingly, than if I were to have excited the jealousy of the Scottish nobles by proclaiming my rank and therewith acting ostentatiously on your behalf. The other matter to which I have alluded, and wherein I became involved almost from the very moment of being cast shipwrecked on these shores, was —Need I explain it ?" and he glanced with manly tenderness upon Mary Douglas.

"Ah, I comprehend !" said the Queen, with another smile of sweet good-natured archness : "you thought the love that you could win for yourself as a plain and comparatively humble Knight, would be the most disinterested and the most unselfish of all possible affections—a love for yourself alone, and not bestowed on account of your mighty wealth, your vast domains, and your princely rank ?—Ah ! and then too, your Highness pictured to yourself how sweet it would be when the moment should come for you to reward all that pure, genuine, and disinterested love, by revealing yourself in all the glories of your position and bidding her become the sharer thereof !"

The smile of acquiescence which appeared upon the lips of the Prince showed that the Queen was

not very far wrong in the surmises which she had volunteered ; while the countenance of Mary Douglas, radiant with happiness, proved how blessed she considered herself to be in having won the love of such a noble heart.

The Count di Guardia was the Chief Equerry and Chamberlain to the Prince di Rimini ; and it was in pursuance of letters received from his illustrious master, that he had come to Scotland at the head of a sufficient retinue to wait upon his Highness. The Count was likewise the bearer of letters from the Pope, empowering the Prince as his special Ambassador to transact certain political matters with the Scottish Court. Thus, when the cannon of the Castle presently thundered forth a salute of nineteen guns, in honour of the formal announcement of this embassy, the rumour quickly began to circulate through the wondering city, that the gallant Sir Lucio Gualdi was no more, but that his Highness Prince Cassio di Rimini existed in his stead.

One month afterwards the nuptials of the Prince and Mary Douglas were celebrated with great splendour at Holyrood ; and amongst the relatives of the lovely bride who were present upon the occasion, was her brother George Douglas.

Diplomatic affairs retained the Prince di Rimini for several months longer in the Scottish capital ; and it was not until the end of January in the following year—namely, 1566—that the Prince, accompanied by his beautiful Princess, and attended by his suite, sailed from Scotland to return unto his vast domains in Italy.

CHAPTER XXI.

TWO TRAGEDIES.

DURING the brief sojourn of the Prince di Rimini in Scotland, all dangers which threaten Mary Stuart were averted, and she was enabled to triumph over all the perils of conspiracy and all the machinations of treason. But it may almost be said that from the very date of the illustrious hero's departure, commenced that extraordinary and terrific series of adversities which swept unfortunate victim onward from one misfortune to another, until this chequered pathway, having begun at the steps of the throne, terminated at those which led to a block.

The following letter, addressed to the Princess di Rimini, at Rome, will afford an indication of the unfortunate Mary Stuart's feelings, upon an occasion which history has rendered too memorable to require any specific details at our hands:—

Holyrood. 12th March, 1566.

"Knowing so well the great love which you bear for me, dearest Mary, as well as the delicate and generous nature of your disposition, I can understand how shocked and horrified you will be on learning the hideous tragedy that has taken place within these walls. Poor Rizzio is no more! One of the most faithful servants that ever a Sovereign possessed has been ruthlessly murdered! You, dear Mary, who entertain an almost filial friendship for the good old man, will feel your bosom wrung with as bitter a grief as that which wrings mine. His devotion to my interests has led to his destruction. But this is not the only source of afflic-

tion for me at the present moment. Alas! I am compelled to record evil words concerning mine own husband. For, even if I should suppress (as God knows I wish I could!) the fatal truth, yet would rumour sooner or later waft it to your ears, and I fear that it must be indelibly chronicled in the pages of history. You will be held in most suspenseful and anxious wonder at what I can be about to relate; and you will feel assured that this preface must be meant to prepare you for some horrible revelation. And it is so. For he whom I have so loved and for whom I have sought to do so much—Oh, Mary! how can I pen the words?—*he* was present when poor Rizzio was slain! Nay, more! he was leagued with these who slew him! He introduced them to my boudoir; and though he dealt no blow at the unfortunate victim, yet did he sympathise with his murderers!

"Heaven grant, dearest Mary, that you may never behold anything approaching in semblance unto the frightful scene which I was doomed to witness, and which must haunt my memory until the latest moments of my existence. My mind is not sufficiently collected to give you any details on this occasion; but when the sense of horrified excitement, intense anguish, and burning indignation shall have somewhat subsided, I will send you the sad narrative. You know the passage at the bottom of the private staircase leading to my boudoir? It is *there* that the remains of poor David now lie;—*there* did the assassins bury him after their foul work was completed! You will shudder to the very

confines of your being when I tell you that the victim of the fearful deed received upwards of fifty wounds ere life quitted him !

" Since writing the preceding lines, I have had a long interview with my husband. He has confessed his complicity in the crime of poor Rizzio's murder ; but he has satisfied me that he was led into it by the mingled threats and cajoleries of the principal conspirators. Yes—the Earl of Morton himself, Lord Chancellor of the Kingdom, dared to desecrate his high office by aiding and abetting in the foul crime ! And what is more, the Earl of Lennox himself, my husband's own father, was one of the instigators of the deed ! Many other influential personages were there concerned in it ; and by their secret representations they so worked upon poor Henry's mind that he was led by fatuous terror into the snare. For, as it now appears, it was told him that Rizzio was secretly his enemy, though ostensibly his friend—and that it was through Rizzio's private counsels that he was prevented from enjoying the paramount privileges and wielding the power of a King instead of a King-consort. And then too, these wicked nobles assured Henry that so great was the jealousy of themselves and their order on account of the influence possessed by David Rizzio at Court, that they would all take up arms in rebellion, recall the Earl of Murray from exile in England, and espouse his cause, unless the object of their hatred were summarily removed. Thus Henry trembled for the safety of his diadem and he has likewise assured me with the most earnest protestations and with floods of

tears, that my welfare and that of our as yet unborn babe was equally present in his thoughts. Thus, although he knew that the assassination of Rizzio would be an evil deed, he suffered himself to become an accomplice in it in order to ward off other and greater evils. And he has fallen at my feet—he has implored my pardon—he has sworn to prove a good and tender husband for the future, and to make common cause with me in all things : so that I have not dared to withhold my forgiveness from him whom I espoused at the altar, and who is the father of the infant soon to see the light of this world !

" Think it not a weakness, dearest Mary, that I have behaved thus towards my husband ; and even if you cannot bring yourself to look upon it as a duty which I have fulfilled, at least must you regard it as a wise expediency. There is another step which I have taken. You will see that it is a bold and decisive—almost a desperate one. But it was the only alternative which circumstances allowed me to adopt, if I would not remain utterly in the power of the blood-stained faction at whose hands poor Rizzio met his death. I have sent to recall our half-brother James ;—for rather would I now trust in the Earl of Murray than in the Earl of Morton ! You will remember, dear Mary, that the Prince your husband left in my possession the ring which on a certain occasion he had received as a pledge of gratitude from the Earl of Murray. This ring I have now despatched by a special messenger to our kinsman James in England, adjuring him by that symbol of the obligation under which he lies to

your husband, to come to me, and prove a champion and a defender against mine enemies ; so that he may by such conduct acquit himself of the debt whose liability is represented by that ring.

" Having received vows and protestations of fidelity from the Duke of Chatelherault, the Earl of Argyll, and other potent peers who were once leagued in enmity against me, I have pardoned them in order that I may encourage them in their return to the paths of loyalty, and strengthen the party by whose aid I can alone hope to encounter, to conquer, and perhaps to *crush* the faction at whose door lies the blood of poor David Rizzio.

" You will weep, dearest Mary—you will shed bitter tears, not only on account of the loss of that good old man, but likewise because of the troubles which have thus come upon.

" Your loving friend,
" MARY STUART."

From the preceding epistle the reader may gather fresh illustrations of the villainous hypocrisy of the young King, and of the great love which he was experienced towards him by the forgiving and too confiding Mary Stuart. The birth of a son three months afterwards naturally tended to strengthen Mary's inclination to extenuate as much as possible the evil deeds of her husband, and to forgive to the utmost of her power, even if she could not forget his complicity in a heinous crime.

The next letter which we are about to place on record, refers to a tragedy as frightful and as memorable as that which involved

the fate of the unfortunate David Rizzio :—

" Holyrood. February 12, 1567.

" I write under the weight of so awful a consternation that I scarcely know what words I may commit to paper. It appears to me as if I were in the midst of some horrible dream—under the influence of an appalling nightmare ! I ask myself if it can be true ? I extend my hand and touch the objects which are around me, to assure myself that I am awake. I doubt whether I am still in the same world into which I was born and with which all my former experiences have been associated ; for, bad though that world be, it now seems as if I had been transported into one that is far worse. The din of a terrific explosion sounds in my ears. It is deafening—stunning—overwhelming. It beats upon my brain—it is as if an awful knell kept up its dreadful ringing just above my head, driving me to distraction—hurrying me on to madness ! And that explosion—did you hear it in the middle of the night ? No, no—idiot that I am ! *You*, dear Mary, are hundreds of miles off—safe, secure, and happy within the sacred walls of Rome, whence you have from time to time written to me letters of such sweet and loving sympathy. But that explosion—it was the knell of poor Henry's death !

" Oh, give me all your fondest and sweetest sympathy now, dear Mary !—for you know not how deeply I need it ! Another murder !—the murder of my husband ! You remember the Kirk o' Field ? That house is now a wreck and ruin—looking like a lightning-blasted tree blackened

with the gunpowder that blew it up ! For thus was it that my Henry died ! He had been ill of the small-pox : he was on a visit at Glasgow when the malady first seized upon him. I flew thither to minister unto him. Vainly was it urged upon me that I might catch the fearful disease : I only remembered my duty as a wife, and I hastened to perform it. I brought the King to Edinburgh : but there was I met with the most earnest remonstrances against my plan of conveying him direct to Holyrood, for fear lest the dread malady should overtake the royal infant whose life is so precious to the interests of Scotland. I yielded as a mother to those considerations which had no weight with me when militating against my duties as a wife. The good Provost offered me his villa for the King's use ; and I accepted it. Oh ! when passing long hours by the side of Henry's couch—and amidst the vigils of the night, when watching him in his feverish sleep—I felt how sad it would be to lose him, and how dear he was unto me as the father of my child, notwithstanding all the past ! But one night I remained not there. He was out of all danger—he was rapidly recovering—he entreated me to procure for myself some change by joining in certain festivities which were to take place that night at Holyrood. He asked it as a personal favour to himself : he bestowed upon me caresses so fond and endearing that they reminded me of the halcyon days of his courtship. Never had I loved him more ; and the one dark spot which was in my memory in connexion with his image, then

appeared to be obliterated ! We parted—never to meet again in this life ! Ere morning dawned the murderous work was done—and my Henry was no more !

“ Oh ! *you*, Mary, who know how I loved him—*you*, Mary, who yourself possess a husband whom you love and adore—*you* can judge what my grief must be ! you can feel for me ! It is terrible. Again my mind seems lost in the night of an appalling bewilderment—wandering vaguely in the utter darkness of a horrible consternation. Can I indeed be still alive ? or am I in a state of death, and yet know it not for a surety ? O Henry, husband of my heart ! father of my child ! art thou indeed gone ?

“ Horrible rumours reach me. The Earl of Lennox has just this moment sent to accuse the Earl of Bothwell of the dread crime. I am bewildered what to think. Since the moment when I pardoned Bothwell at Callander House—you remember the occasion, dear Mary ?—he hath shown the most loyal and respectful devotion towards me. What interest could he have in committing such a crime ? It were nothing short of madness for any one to suppose—though Lennox hints it—that the Earl of Bothwell could possibly aspire to my hand. The bare idea would be a flagrant insult to myself ;—even now it flushes my cheeks with a glowing indignation. For in the first place he knows that I dislike him : and secondly it were a monstrous outrage to my feelings to think that by such a crime he could win my hand. And then too, the idea is not merely revolting and preposterous :—it is ridiculous also. For the Earl of Bothwell is

already married ! What, then, does Lennox mean by this accusation ? I cannot understand it. Yet let him make his charge, and Bothwell shall be commanded to answer it. Indeed, I pray to heaven that it may enable me to deal retribution upon the murderers of my husband !

" Oh, dearest Mary, no wonder that I am bewildered by all the harrowing thoughts that fill my brain ! Reason rocks upon its throne : the intellect is well nigh crushed. May the blessed saints intercede on my behalf, that the Almighty may spare me, and save my mental faculties from wreck, for the sake of my fatherless child !

" Commend me in all friendship, dear Mary, to your august husband : and tell his Highness that on more than one occasion within the last twelve-month have I exclaimed in my anguish. "*Oh, for one hour of the brave Gualdi !*" For by that name is the Prince ever associated in my memory with the great deeds he performed on my behalf.

" Thine affectionate
but afflicted friend

" MARY STUART."

Notwithstanding all the indignities the Queen had sustained at the hands of her vicious, ill-conditioned, profligate and heartless husband, she loved him unto the last,—and, reckless of her own health and beauty, nursed him through the terrific malady which in those times was often wont to defy the physician's skill, or to leave its fearful marks on those whom it might choose to spare.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOLYROOD—LOCHLEVEN—
FOTHERINGAY.

THE third letter which we purpose to lay before our readers, and which was addressed to the Princess di Rimini at Rome, refers to another memorable episode in the life of the unfortunate Queen of Scots. It is as follows :—

" Holyrood. May 14, 1567.

" If some of my previous letters have horrified and afflicted you, my dear Mary, the present epistle will astound you. Indeed, if I were at once, and without any preface, to pen the announcement which I have to make, you would be shocked—you would fling down the paper in loathing and disgust—you would lose all your confidence in human nature ; for you would think that I had suddenly become a monster of depravity and wickedness. And yet you know me too well, my sweet friend, to suspect me capable of any wilful deed that might bring a blush up to my cheeks. Will you not, therefore, give me credit for truthfulness and sincerity when I tell you that it is under the irresistible pressure of circumstances that I am about to take a step so well calculated to astound you ? You will already have said to yourself that it must be a very important measure which requires the prelude of so much circumlocution to explain it. And it is so ! In one word, to-morrow will see me become the wife of the Earl of Bothwell.

" Yes, Mary—the wife of him who was tried for the murder of my dear lamented Henry, and who

though triumphantly acquitted, has not by that verdict cleared himself from the dark suspicions which rest against him. Yes ! I am about to marry Bothwell ! "*But, you will exclaim, he is already married !*" No ; he has been divorced from his wife by legal tribunal and ecclesiastical decree. You need not ask me if any sentiment of the heart be concerned in this union ?--you would not insult your friend by such a question ! And inasmuch as it is by the sternest and most irresistible coercion that I am compelled to accompany that man to the altar, I rejoice that he is of repulsive looks, ungainly in figure, uncouth in manners, coarse and brutal in disposition, and in every sense opposed to the delicacy of my own tastes. Yes—I rejoice, I say, that such he should be physically and mentally ; because the world which now looks upon the deed must know that it is some tremendous sacrifice that I am making on my part—while future history, however distorted it may become, can scarcely have the audacity to pretend that I married this man for love.

"Then why do I accompany him to the altar ? I will tell you. The other day—a fortnight back—I was journeying with a small retinue but totally unsuspecting of impending danger, from Stirling homeward. All of a sudden, near the Fountain bridge, at no great distance from Edinburgh, I was surrounded by a party of a thousand horsemen, all armed to the teeth. Resistance with my handful of followers was out of the question. Thus did I become the Earl of Bothwell's prisoner : and despite my indignant remonstrances—despite the entreaties to which I also condescended

I was conveyed a prisoner to his castle of Dunbar. Days passed—yes, passed, in the vain hope that some of my nobles, remaining loyal to their Queen, would come to my rescue. Vain idea !—succour arrived not. I strove to send letters to those on whom methought I could count for assistance : but my correspondence was intercepted. Bothwell had launched into too desperate a game to play it by halves : he therefore took every precaution to render his treason successful.

"What was his aim ? I demanded it. Conceive my wonder—picture to yourself my consternation—when he boldly presented me a document, signed by the greatest nobles in the land, and recommending that false Earl as my husband. Yes !—no less than eight prelates of the Church, nine Earls, seven Barons, and numbers of other powerful chiefs, had subscribed their names to that audacious paper ! I spurned the idea. The next day Bothwell dared insult me in the gardens of his castle, and in the presence of my handmaidens. He defied me to persist in my refusal to accompany him to the altar. Those who had signed the document would dethrone me if I did—disinherit my child—destroy my dynasty—and raise up another Sovereign ! Still I yielded not to these threats. Better to lose my diadem, and that my son should sink into obscurity, than that I should cover myself with dishonour. Such was my response. Never shall I forget the diabolical smile with which that bold and desperate man bade me bear in mind that not merely was my crown in his power ; but also my very honour—and that I was powerless *there*,

against whatsoever violence he might choose to perpetrate !

" Mary, I can write no more. To the very last I persisted in my refusal—but the fiend did his worst. My wine-cup was drugged—and—you comprehend me—I have now no alternative but to save my honour by accompanying him to the altar ! You will say I might die ? But no ! I have a child to live for ;—and for that dear boy must I live, even though the rest of my existence be a series of agonies and excruciations—one unvarying and ineffable martyrdom !

" Pity me, dearest Mary—but do not blame me !"

" MARY STUART."

We need scarcely inform the reader of history how the Queen's marriage with Bothwell led to a fresh rebellion—how the royal troops refused to combat the rebels when they met at Carberry Hill—how Mary Stuart surrendered herself to Kircaldy of Grange—and how the very moment she thus found herself released from the stern coercive power of Bothwell she banished the detested wretch from her presence. And that same chapter of history likewise tells how the unfortunate Queen was sent as a prisoner to Lochleven Castle ; while the reins of power were assumed by her traitorous half brother, the Earl of Murray, with the title of Regent. It is but a short note which we have here to insert, and which she penned within the walls of that gloomy fortress upon the island of the lake :—"

" LOCHLEVEN. MAY 7, 1568.

" You did well, my dearest Mary, to obey my recommendation,

and *not* come to offer me your sympathy and consolation in this prison-place : for your presence here might perchance have excited suspicion—aye, even in the bosom of your mother, the Lady Douglas of Lochleven ; for who could forget all your devotedness of former years to my cause ? But your letters to your brother George have produced the desired effect. He has promised to connive at my escape." Indeed everything is now settled—friends outside are waiting to receive me with open arms—and perhaps the next billet that I may forward will not have been penned in caution and despatched by stealth, but will be openly addressed to you from Holyrood. I have suffered much, dear friend—God only knows how much !—but I am now full of hopes once more.

" MARY STUART."

Alas ! instead of addressing her next letter from the royal palace of Holyrood to the Princess di Rimini in Italy, it was from England that the unfortunate Queen penned a few hasty lines, announcing the fatal intelligence of the total defeat of her army at Langside shortly after her escape from Lochleven—how the Regent Murray had proved completely victorious—and how she had been constrained to take refuge on English soil, throwing herself upon the tender mercies of Elizabeth.

Years passed away, yes, many long years no less than nineteen—since the occurrences just referred to ; and then the last letter which the Princess di Rimini received from the unfortunate Queen, told how the curtain was about to drop

on the tragedy of her career. It is as follows :—

“Fotheringay Castle. February, 1587.

“When you receive this, my dear friend, all will be over ; and my spirit will have left a world of misery and suffering, to find repose and happiness in another and better sphere. When last you visited me in my English captivity—when last you and your noble husband journeyed from your far off Italian home and came across the seas to proffer your friendly sympathy—I spoke hopefully, because I would not willingly depress your spirits. But there was nevertheless at the time a presentiment in my soul, which told me that the rancour of Elizabeth of England would pursue me unto the death. And that hour is now close at hand ! After suborning every possible species of perjury in order to convict me of crimes against the bare idea of which my soul revolts—after suffering letters which I renounced and repudiated as vilest forgeries, to be received as evidence against me—the agents of Queen Elizabeth have, in her name and at her instigation, hunted me to the block ! Yes, dear friend—this day I am to die ! In the great hall of this castle the dismal preparations for death are made. Yet weep not for me, dearest friend !—weep not for me, I say ! Death comes as a release ; and even now that his sable wings are closing as if I were around me, his presence is fraught with no terrors, because my soul is conscious of no crimes !

“I pardon all mine enemies,—not even excepting the most remorseless and un pitying of them all, the Queen of England ! It is not in such a moment as this,—when hovering on the confines of two worlds, and about to pass from the known and the sad one to the unknown but happy one,—it is not in such a moment as this, I say, that my heart could cherish enmity or my soul be defiled with hatred and malice. Therefore is the pardon which I bestow upon mine enemies as illimitable as the persecution I have sustained at their hands. And this I—vow at the supreme moment while beholding Death face to face !

“Farewell for ever, dear friend !—farewell also to your illustrious husband ! and may you continue to be blest,” in the enjoyment of each other's love, as well as in the dutiful affection of the blooming family that is growing up around you.”

“MARY STUART.”

Ere concluding our narrative, we must pause for a single moment to remark that Mary Seaton remained in faithful attendance upon her royal mistress until the crowning scene of the tragedy at Fortheringay Castle separated the hapless Queen from her devoted handmaiden, who immediately afterwards returned to Scotland, where she passed the remainder of her days in melancholy retirement.

